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PAULA FERRIS

Mary Farley Sanborn

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By MARY FARLEY SANBORN.

SWEET AND TWENTY . . A Novel.
IT CAME TO PASS . . . A Novel.
PAULA FERRIS . . . . . A Novel.

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LEE AND SHEPARD, Publishers, Boston.

PAULA FERRIS

BY

MARY FARLEY SANBORN

AUTHOR OF "SWEET AND TWENTY" "IT CAME TO PASS" ETC.

BOSTON

LEE AND SHEPARD PUBLISHERS

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1893

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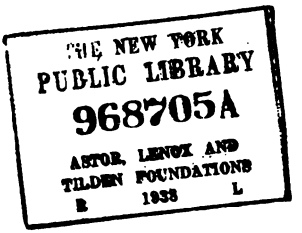

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Paula Ferris

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PAULA FERRIS

CHAPTER I

AN INFORMAL TEA

A STRIP of pale yellow sky extended along the horizon where the cold, gray cloud had lifted. There had been a flurry of fine, dry snow which the wind had driven into little heaps on the sidewalk; a few flakes were still spinning about in the crisp air. It was near night, and indeed past sunset; it was growing piercingly cold, and Mrs. Ferris shivered as she closed the front door upon the last of her afternoon guests, and hurried back to the parlor.

The chandeliers were already lighted; and in the library, at the rear of the larger apartment, an open wood-fire was burning briskly, casting a cheerful, dancing gleam on walls, pictures, and furniture. The parlor was in confusion. Groups of chairs and tables were huddled together, the latter being strewn with playing-cards hastily thrown down. A woman sat by one of them with her elbow resting upon it, and her chin supported in her hand; with one finger-

tip she was absently rubbing a tiny scratch on the polished surface of the table.

"Are you disappointed because you did not get the prize, Olive?" said Mrs. Ferris, with a laugh.

The woman drew a long breath, as she roused herself, and began slowly gathering up the cards one by one. Her absent expression changed to one of active discontent.

"Well, the cup and saucer were certainly very pretty, and different from anything I have ever seen. I did not care for the tray; but it does vex me beyond everything to have such wretched luck as I had this afternoon. Did you hear what Mrs. Garrowell said to me just after we had finished the last hand? She said, 'My dear Mrs. Goring, if you had responded to my call for trumps, we should have made two more points.' Did you ever hear such insolence from a woman who is capable of leading three aces in succession?"

Mrs. Ferris was standing near her friend, and looking down at her with a smile on her warm, curved lips, and in her soft, bright brown eyes. As she listened, one hand was slowly stroking her hair up from the nape of her slender neck. The hair was of a reddish brown, and so curly as to be almost unmanageable. It would never twist smooth, but would break loose about her face from the thick parting to the small ear that was half out of sight under the crisp waves. Her forehead was very low, and the delicate eyebrows so arched as to lend an expression of childlike wonder to the whole piquant

face. The face was slightly thin, and showed faint shadows under the cheekbones where the light of the chandelier fell on it from above; but the texture of the skin was still fine and smooth, and the color warm and fair.

"Never mind, Olive, you will forgive Mrs. Garrowell when you find that you are invited to her reception."

"What do you mean, Paula?" said the woman at the table, looking up quickly.

"Why, I happen to know that you are down for cards."

"Oh!" Mrs. Goring's face expressed the rapt astonishment of the Peri when the gates of heaven were at last opened to her.

"There, you see you are delighted! You don't hate her so badly as you did a moment ago. You will quite love her directly."

"But how do you know?" persisted Mrs. Goring.

"Simply enough," replied her friend, turning away. "I saw the list."

"Oh, yes; you go there," murmured the other.

"When I choose. I don't choose to go very often. If Mrs. Garrowell were not so very good, I should say she was very tiresome. She is a woman who is bound to the conventions. I do wish Angela would come home." Mrs. Ferris walked over to the window, and pulling aside the heavy draperies, raised the shade to look down the street.

"You are so funny, Paula," said Olive, meditatively, looking after her.

"Why? Because I am not exactly like you?"

"There is nothing you seem to care for."

"There are three things I care very much for," returned Mrs. Ferris, — "my music, my charities, and Angela."

She bit her lip the moment she had spoken, and her cheeks colored faintly even in the shadow of the curtain. She had not included the object of affection that naturally suggests itself first of all to a loving wife; but Mrs. Goring was thinking of something else, and did not notice the omission.

"And 'Hesperus,'" she said, with a touch of derision in her tone.

"Yes, I like Grace Maury very much," replied Mrs. Ferris, quietly.

"But I could see that Mrs. Garrowell was determined to snub her this afternoon. She was not at all nice to her when they happened to be at the table together, and once I saw her looking Miss Maury all over with her lorgnette."

Mrs. Ferris laughed. "Did you notice that Grace was very much disconcerted?"

"Oh, a newspaper reporter! But really, Paula, that is one thing I was thinking of when I said you are so funny. You are always picking up such peculiar people."

"Am I always dropping them?" interrupted Mrs. Ferris, turning her starry eyes upon her friend.

"N-no, I don't know that you are."

"Well, then, there must be some reason for my keeping them. But speaking of absurdities, could

anything be funnier than your anxiety to get into Mrs. Garrowell's set? You are actually willing to deprive yourself of the comforts of life for the sake of living in a fashionable neighborhood, and having a ticket to the Rehearsals, and sending to Paris for your gowns, simply because you think you must do those things in order to get in with Mrs. Garrowell, whom you detest all the time. And, after all, her set is only a heaven of the third or fourth degree, and there are several heavens in fashionable society, you know, as well as in the Swedenborgian hereafter."

"Do you think it is kind, Paula, to throw my poverty in my face?" asked Olive, with an aggrieved air.

"Now, Olive, don't be silly!" Mrs. Ferris dropped the curtain, and came forward in her impulsive, girlish way. "It is not a question of being poor or rich; and if it were, they are only relative terms. There is always something out of one's reach, no matter how much money one can command. But you know, dear, that you and Mr. Goring could be living in a delightful way in some pretty little house in a side street, and have everything you wished for your personal comfort on the same income with which you are struggling to cover your expenses in Commonwealth Avenue. And what are you getting in return for all your painful economies? — the *entrée* to a circle beyond which there is another, and beyond that another that it will cost you just as much to gain. And whom are these circles made up of? —

people who are satisfied with themselves, who do not care to be any more than they are. Do you realize what that means? It means mental stagnation; it means a certain number of men and women eating and drinking and dancing and driving together, and wishing all the time that they were eating, drinking, dancing, and driving with another set of men and women who are supposed to be just beyond them in the social system. It does not mean the exchange of ideas or the exercise of any of the higher functions. It means dress and display, and putting the best material on the outside, — an endless striving to make a better appearance than some one else, to give a better dinner, or wear a smarter gown, or drive a sleeker pair of horses than your neighbor; and nobody knows, or at least if they know it they pretend to ignore it, that behind the lace window-curtains — "

"Say it," put in Olive, bitterly. "There are shabby carpets and worn furniture."

"Oh, Olive, I did not mean that at all! I was thinking of the bitterness and the dissatisfaction and the jealousy and the disappointment that come with trying to live up to the standards of society. But really," said Paula, with a sort of sweet frankness, "I do think you would enjoy your home more if your own rooms were as pretty as the parlor, and the parlor a little less expensive. You could have furnished a charming little sitting-room, dear, with what you paid for those two sets of window draperies."

"Oh, yes; I suppose all you say is perfectly true." Mrs. Goring's voice had acquired a certain flatness, with the suspicion of a tremble under it. "You know very well, Paula, that I have nothing to live for, — nothing whatever. I might as well put an ingrain carpet and a painted chamber-set in my room, and practise wretched little economies on my table, as try to have the happy home in a side street that you speak of. How much of a home would any place be to me? How could I be happy anywhere, when my husband — "

"Yes, I know," Paula responded quickly. She reached one warm hand across the table, and gave her friend's fingers a sympathetic pressure. "Let me make you a cup of tea, Olive."

"Oh, yes; do give me some tea, and then I must go home."

When Mrs. Ferris had touched the bell, she wandered over to the window again. Both women seemed to regard the subject of their conversation as having been dropped for the present. Perhaps it is true that two women cannot long continue the discussion of any topic without running up against some personal obstacle that transmutes reason at once into sentiment, and logic into sympathy. Loss almost always implies something of gain; and it may be that these small experiences serve to knit two women's lives together more closely than men's lives are apt to be knit. These two had come into an understanding of each other that brought to both a certain peace of mind. Paula knew that Olive had

tacitly admitted the truth of her arguments; and Olive knew that Paula cared because her own lot was so bitter and so lonely.

If there were any bitterness in Paula's life, it was not apparent even to her most intimate friend. She was, to all appearance, the satisfied wife of a successful lawyer, and the happy mother of a child whom both parents idolized. But in her heart Paula felt that in the little girl there existed the only tie that bound herself and her husband together. Roger Ferris was twelve years older than his wife, and his business made such demands upon him that his family could have but little of his society. He had a study at the top of the house for quiet, where he spent most of his evenings, with now and then an hour or two at his club. Occasionally he went with Paula to a dinner or reception, and he never failed to show himself at her parties. He was a good-looking, self-possessed man, of the pale, dark type, — a man respected by other men for his professional ability, and liked by women for the grave, yet gentle deference he always displayed toward them.

If Paula and her husband had met later in life, they might have understood each other better. But to a girl of eighteen a man of thirty is already past his prime; and Paula, torn, as she had called it, from a boyish lover, to be married to this grave man, had never been able to divest herself of her first impressions of him.

She thought him reserved, which he was, and cold, which he was not; and she comprehended him

so little, that as time went on she asked herself with more or less bitterness, why, if he had not loved her, he should have been so determined to marry her. She had speedily forgotten her youthful lover, and Angela had come to enrich her life; but there was still something lacking in it. She had never been loved in the way that she wished to be; for there are some women's hearts that cannot be filled by the simple affection of a child. Paula was full of sentiment, — she was romantic, if you will have it so; and at twenty-five she had not lived long enough to have become indifferent to the theatrical side of life. She was not frivolous, she took even her pleasures seriously, and she would have built an altar to the man she loved.

On his own part, Ferris was hardly what could be called a happy man; but he had his business in which to sink his personal disappointment, and he saw so much of greater dissatisfaction than his own in the cases that came to him, that he was disposed to thank God for a home which at least presented the outward appearance of harmony. He had been as ardent a wooer as a man of thirty may be with a mistress of eighteen, who is only a little more than a child in knowledge; but pleading with a shy young girl to marry you is a very different thing from urging a listless and unresponsive wife to try and love you a little. Ferris believed that his marriage had been a mistake, at least so far as Paula's happiness was concerned, and he sought to remedy it as much as was possible by indulging all her

caprices to their fullest extent. He never ordered her actions in any way; he made her a generous allowance, and refrained from criticising her charities, even when he knew them to be most unwise. If he gave her less of his society than of his income, it was because he had reason to believe that she was happier without him.

Angela was their common ground; there they almost met. Paula forgot that Roger was her husband, and twelve years her senior, when she repeated to him across the dinner-table some wise speech the child had made that day; and Ferris relaxed his dignity to a degree that his clients would never have suspected in some of his wild romps with Angela in the nursery. There he and Paula laughed together, and it had often seemed to her that she should be able to keep up the good-fellowship below stairs. But Roger always became again the same formal, courteous, yet distant gentleman as soon as he had smoothed his rumpled hair and arranged his necktie.

Ferris would probably have said it was Paula who changed.

When Mrs. Ferris had made her friend a cup of tea, she went back to her post at the window. "I don't see where Angela can be," she said anxiously. "I sent Nora for her half an hour ago. Do you think she can have missed the house?"

"Where is the child?" inquired Olive, a trifle impatiently.

"At Mrs. Linn's. Helen has a party."

"Well, she is sure to come home safely. You

give yourself a great deal of unnecessary worry about that child."

"You say that because you have never been a mother, Olive."

"For which I am devoutly thankful. To bring another human being into the world to go through what I have had to endure is the last thing I should desire."

"I can understand your feeling," Mrs Ferris answered gravely.

"But perhaps you will make me some more tea."

"Yes, certainly." Paula, with one backward glance over her shoulder, turned again from her post at the window.

"Angela will come just as soon if you don't watch for her," Olive said, indolently following the process of tea-making from the depths of her easy-chair. "Oh, how is the portrait coming on? I have not thought to ask you."

A sort of consciousness overspread Paula's face, as she bent over the tea-caddy.

"Very well, Mr. Hagar thinks. I have not seen it for two or three weeks."

"And it is right here — in the house?" Olive cried, lifting her brows.

"Why, yes; but Mr. Hagar wishes me not to see it until it is nearly done. He thinks I can judge it better than if I looked at it every day, and I think so too."

"I should look. I should not be able to help it, especially if I were told not to. Does he come every day?"

"Oh, no, indeed," answered Mrs. Ferris, hastily.

"Every week?"

"He comes twice a week,— Tuesdays and Fridays."

"Mm-hm. He is very handsome, is he not?"

There was a slight hesitation before Paula replied, "I believe he is called so."

"Oh, come, Paula, you are really too absurd! Of course you know that he is handsome. I believe you think your husband the only good-looking man in Boston."

"Here is Angela!" exclaimed Mrs. Ferris.

She ran to open the door; and presently the child bustled into the room, looking neither to right nor left, but going straight to a sofa, where she deposited her muff, and began an excited search for her dress-pocket.

"How frosty you smell, darling!" cried her mother. "Let me feel your cheeks. Oh, how cold they are!"

She seemed to have become a child herself. She got down on one knee beside Angela, and watched with delight the eager attempt to extract some object from the small pocket. The little girl was trembling with excitement; and she broke into a high-pitched laugh, as she drew forth and unfurled a tiny gauze fan, gayly painted in butterflies.

"It was right beside my plate, mamma, when we sat down to supper; and, mamma, Daisy had pink, and Florrie had blue, and oh! I don't membra what Jessie had; but don't you think yellow is the prettiest? — Why, it does n't look yellow at all in the gaslight; but it *is* yellow, you 'll see in the morning, mamma —"

"Yes, dear; be quiet. It is very pretty. Go and show it to Mrs. Goring."

Olive was not fond of children in general; but she made an exception of Angela, for whom she had an undemonstrative sort of affection. She had taken the child on her lap, and was examining the pretty gift, when the doorbell rang.

"Oh, there 's papa!" cried Angela, slipping down, and running into the hall. "Papa, see my fan,— see my fan, papa. Oh! why, it 's Mr. Hagar! I thought you were papa! Was n't it funny? Mamma, I thought Mr. Hagar was papa."

Mrs. Ferris greeted the new-comer with the kind of self-possession which when it is not quite genuine is very artificial; but Olive, who had never met the young painter, was too much engrossed with her first impressions of him to notice any change in her friend's manner, and Paula's involuntary blush had had time to ebb before she handed Mr. Hagar his cup of tea.

"Just what I came for, Mrs. Ferris," he said. "I knew the ceremony would be going on about this time, and that no candidate for charity was ever turned away from your doors. Are you a mendicant like myself, Mrs. Goring?"

"Oh, no; Olive is on the inside," interposed Paula, with a laugh.

"I hope you are not such an impostor as some of them are, Mr. Hagar," said Olive, her eyes meeting his over the edge of her cup.

They were rather fine eyes, Hagar noticed. Being

an artist, he was bound to be an observer of feminine beauty; but Mrs. Goring's face was not one to interest him long.

She was of the type that a painter of faces would be likely to designate as commonplace, though from a less critical point of view she was undeniably a pretty woman. If she had not been, Horace Goring would in all probability never have married her; but neither her prettiness nor her sincerity, with all her woman's wit into the bargain, had sufficed to hold his affection. As a girl Olive had been ambitious, sitting up till midnight to master a difficult lesson, for the sake of being at the head of her class; as a woman, it was still her desire to be at the front of everything she undertook. Marriage to her had been a far more bitter and disappointing experiment than it had been to Paula, to whom the picturesque quality of the situation lent it a certain attractiveness. The two women were essentially different. Paula could not help viewing her own grievances in a footlight effect; while for Olive there was no sort of illusion to relieve their heaviness. Her face had grown to wear a look of weary abstraction, the result of hours of anxious study as to ways and means; it fell into this expression of itself when she was either thinking or listening intently, and lit up only when, for the time being, she had quite forgotten herself and the circumstances of her life.

Hagar stood by Paula's side, holding his cup untasted, and watching, with an æsthetic pleasure, the movements of her hands as she prepared her

own. Her small, supple thumb, with its pink tip and polished nail, lay on the edge of the Dresden saucer like a rose-leaf. Very few women have pretty thumbs. Hagar, who had studied hands from his boyhood, knew that.

The young portrait-painter was of good height, and strongly built; in color warm, though not in the least ruddy. His crisp hair was of pure gold; and so were the mustache and short, close beard he wore. He had a pair of frank, laughing blue eyes, and a slightly sarcastic mouth that when he smiled showed a row of small, even, white teeth. His pliant figure fell of itself into poses of unconscious grace. He had the unquestionably bad habit of standing with one hand half thrust into the pocket of his coat, when he wore a sack coat,— which he did whenever occasion allowed, and sometimes when it did not. The hand was muscular, and looked equally capable of stroking and of strangling.

"Why do you not drink?" Paula asked, without looking up. She had just lifted the infuser to see if her own tea had brewed sufficiently.

"I am waiting for you."

"But your tea will be quite cold. I always let mine stand a long time, you know. I want it strong if I am to have it at all."

"I like it cold," murmured Hagar. There was a subtle flattery in his very tone; but Angela was passing the biscuits to Olive just then, and making a cover for the speech with her shrill, childish voice.

"That is not true," Paula retorted, smiling in spite

of herself. She glanced up, met his downward look, and colored warmly. "If you do not drink at once, I will not make you any more," she added with decision; and Hagar immediately raised the cup to his lips.

Mrs. Goring, upon whom very little was lost, intercepted the glance. A certain atmosphere of mutual understanding which sometimes isolates two persons from a whole roomful, even when they are apparently unaware of each other's presence, surrounded this pair. Olive's perceptions were not especially fine. She saw things in their hard, general outlines without much light and shade; but her attention was somehow attracted and held by these two, as they stood side by side before her.

She sipped her tea somewhat abstractedly after that, giving the pair a sweeping, comprehensive glance from time to time. She did not pretend to love her own husband, who went his ways as if oblivious of her existence; and if she had chosen to console herself in some mild way for his neglect, she would probably have escaped unfriendly criticism, for the world is not apt to be severe upon a neglected wife.

But Paula's husband doted upon and indulged her to the last degree. Olive had the greatest respect and admiration for Mr. Ferris. He was handsome and well-bred and generous; if he were somewhat lacking in social *savoir faire*, he made up for it in other ways. He could not be wholly at his ease where something was expected of him which he had

not to give. He carried no small coin of empty fluency; but open up a subject worthy of a thoughtful man's consideration, and he had something to say that would be worth thinking over the next day. He could see nothing in the pleasures that Paula affected to despise, but in which she nevertheless found the satisfaction that a pretty and popular woman always feels when she is winning the general admiration. The cockle-shell of a woman's complacency can float only when the waters are oiled with adulation.

Paula was not superior to the rest of her sex in this respect; and for her sake Ferris endured what was distasteful and even sickening to him, and never complained. He disguised his lack of ease under a certain dignified reserve which gave him the reputation of being cold, especially with the women who tried to flirt with him, and who found their coquetries returning to them like toy arrows from a surface of polished stone.

If Paula had ever complained that her husband was cold, Olive would have told her smartly that if he were, it was her own fault. Mrs. Goring's husband was a brute, — not a savage brute, but a stolid one, with a brute's utter unconsciousness of the higher attributes of tenderness and unselfishness. Olive had often told Paula that if she had had to live with such a man she would have killed him; but she herself had borne her life somehow, as so many women do. She had never been able to think seriously of leaving him, though she had resolved to get

what she could out of life legitimately. Perhaps she was not to blame if her own experience had somewhat colored her opinion of men in general; at any rate, she had small faith in any of them, with the exception of Roger Ferris. She would not have allowed that Paula had the smallest excuse for departing from the path of fidelity, though she viewed her own situation with more or less bitterness, and would have held herself pardonable for any ordinary transgression on the ground that she had no incentive to faithfulness.

However, she remained in fact true to the man who assumed his own liberty in every act of his daily life. She knew that he might sometime be in sore need of her, and that, unloving and unlovable as he was, she was the only person who could stand between him and the consequences that he must sooner or later bring upon himself.

CHAPTER II

HAGAR

If Mrs. Goring's estimate of Hagar had been a just one, and he was really the flirt she believed him to be, it would also have been true that he was such chiefly from force of circumstances. A man does not make himself, whatever he may be able to do in the way of cultivation and modification; and Hagar was not directly responsible for the fact that most women liked him in a greater or less degree, according to their age and susceptibility. This was principally because his eyes were blue, and his smile peculiarly frank and sweet. That he was not unprincipled enough to encourage them to make utter fools of themselves (as there is no denying some women will sometimes do with men) was, perhaps, merely one of the modifying circumstances that Nature employs to prevent any one cause from working complete disaster in this world of ours.

But Hagar was too fastidious for general and indiscriminate flirtation. As an artist he could admire and even adore, without being in the least moved emotionally. He had the same enthusiasm for his human subjects that a painter of still life may feel for a turnip in the proper light,— neither more nor less. Nevertheless, perhaps because of

this exasperating indifference, he had become the fashion.

He had been taught in the realistic school; but he was shrewd enough to know that it paid to idealize. His portraits were always satisfactory, which means that they were almost always flattering. He called them pot-boilers to his artist friends; but while he really despised them, he continued to paint them.

He did most of his work at his studio, for he found his subjects very willing to come to him. They were mostly women, and the husbands and fathers paid the bills. Hagar was uniformly agreeable to these ladies; and they thought him very poetic and fascinating, — a modern Orlando, to whom it would be delightful to play the Rosalind. They did not see him in the evening, when a corner of his dusty table was cleared for a late lunch of black bread and Swiss cheese (liberally spread with German mustard), sardines, olives, and Scotch ale. Artist friends shared this entertainment; for Hagar was popular with men as well as with women, and particularly with those of his own profession. They had ample evidence that he could do good work, and they admired him for it. They had had too enlightening an experience of their own not to look indulgently on the pot-boilers. They dared not paint a fence without a robin perched upon the top rail, or a pool of water without a cow knee-deep within it, or an autumn landscape without a clump of red and yellow trees, or a marsh without a flight of birds. It was indecent to go unclothed, and uncomfortable to starve;

and since one must subsist chiefly upon the uncultivated taste, it was necessary to cater to the same.

In Angela, Hagar had a subject after his own artistic heart. There was no need to idealize,— the child was as perfect as if she had been planned. Her hair was like her mother's, reddish brown, though not so unmanageable as Paula's. It clung close to her head till it reached the nape of her neck, where it rolled out in thick, loose curls. She had her father's mouth and chin, — a firm, resolute, grave mouth, and a wide, firm chin; the lines of course softened by youth, but still betokening determination. The ideality of her face was in the brow and eyes. Paula covered the former with a thick fringe of hair, cut short enough to show the lower half of its smooth whiteness.

But the eyes, — they were the veritable lamps of her soul. They were like pools of brown water, into which the sunlight strikes, revealing their clearness, but not their depth. Paula's eyes were brown, but they were bright and soft, rather than grave and deep; and Ferris's were of a dark hazel, steady and searching, and at times stern in expression. It was as if Angela's eyes looked forth the wistfulness and yearning that must grow out of a loveless marriage. More than that, there was in them a suggestion of insight that is far beyond mere shrewdness, — an expression that sometimes made the mother shrink from her child's gaze.

And indeed Angela had developed peculiarly. She had had fewer illnesses, perhaps, than the average

child; but she had always been what is called delicate, subsisting like an orchid on the smallest possible amount of nourishment, and of so sensitive a nervous organization that they were always obliged to make up for any extra excitement by some provision of added rest. She was so easily grieved that even an abrupt speech from her mother affected her like a reprimand, which in the five years of her little life had hardly once been called for. Paula had a superstitious belief that good children seldom live to grow up. She used to wish sometimes that Angela would be naughty and disagreeable; and Ferris partly shared this feeling. At all events, he knew that the child's sweetness would but give to their regret an added bitterness, should they be called upon to part with her.

But Angela was a happy child, with a child's healthy fondness for dolls and toys and the society of other children. We bury these little people a thousand times over in our anxieties and forebodings, in the calamities that we go forth to meet, in the imaginings that eat into the fruit of love. After all, we are never prepared for sorrow when it comes; so why should we darken our happiness with these foreshadowings of loss? It is better to count each day a day of blessing that does not take from us some one who is dear, and when grief comes, to be glad that, even for a short space, we have known the joy of giving and of taking love.

While Hagar painted, Paula usually held Angela on her lap, or sat close beside her; she was never

absent from the nursery on these occasions. They were accustomed to talk freely on one subject and another; and when Hagar was in the mood for silence, Paula accommodated herself to that also. She frequently amused herself with a book, when he was indisposed for conversation; sometimes she read aloud a passage that attracted her attention, and they would talk it over together. Their opinions did not always coincide, and they frequently had spirited discussions, which were apt to leave Paula annoyed and Hagar amused. Mrs. Ferris was extremely unconventional in all her views of life, as a woman can afford to be who is hedged about by other safeguards than her own judgment.

Her father had been a radical on all subjects. He had not only believed in, but preached, free religion, free love, and the freedom of speech. He had edited a small paper which promulgated his own ideas, and those of the little circle which he had gathered about him, for he was something of a leader. He was one of the few who, if they accomplish nothing else, help to keep the world from stagnating in a too often meaningless code of right and wrong. It is well that the good conservatives should now and then bestir themselves to ascertain *why* the radicals are not right. Paula's father was a brilliant and logical, if not a practical thinker. He was, moreover, a sincere man, and in his private life irreproachable even from the points of view he declared to be arbitrary and conventional. His wife, a woman who never thought for herself, had deplored her hus-

band's views as not being popular in the world to whose skirts she would willingly have clung. She was half ashamed and half proud of him, and she was wholly relieved when Paula's marriage was at last accomplished.

Paula was still a schoolgirl when her father died, and his theories had not begun to affect her life materially; but as she grew older, bits of his philosophy that had been sprinkled upon the soil of her youthful mind began to take root and grow with a certain vitality of their own. She knew that her father had held the marriage bond to be of itself but a meaningless tie, binding only when agreeable to both parties; and it was only natural that she should look at her own marriage in the light of his belief, and apply that test to it. If her father had been living, and the case had been referred to him, he would undoubtedly have advised Paula to be happy under conditions that nobody but a fool would have quarrelled with; for he was wise enough to know that Ferris was one man in a thousand, with whom his daughter ought to have been happy if she was not.

But Paula, in her discontented moments, cherished an ardent longing for her father, and the comfort she believed he would have given her. She was not aware how much of this feeling was mere sentiment. She remembered him as a delightful playmate, and later as a friend who had gone hand-in-hand with her through her Latin translations and the algebra she hated. Both parents were dead now, and she had lost sight of all her remaining relatives, only

one of whom she at all remembered, — a cousin of her father, John Wilton, who had been more or less about the house during her girlhood. Mentally she recollected him rather vaguely as having been an enthusiastic disciple of Thoreau and of Thomas Paine, carrying her father's theories to the very brink of fanaticism, and given to declaring them loudly both in and out of season. In personal appearance he was clearer to her mind, closely resembling her father, though much younger, and with a manner that had been brusque and abrupt in contrast to her father's gentle serenity.

Regard for her father's memory, and the sacred remembrance of his comradeship, probably made her more faithful to his philosophy than she would otherwise have been. She did not give free utterance to the beliefs which had been vital to his mind; but she now and then allowed herself to be roused into an inadvertent expression of them which horrified some persons, amused others, and gave Ferris a little anxiety, not because he feared that she would ever put her transplanted theories into practice, but because, being a man, he knew how liable she was to be misunderstood. But Paula regarded the slightest opposition to these opinions as an affront to her father's memory, and resented it accordingly. Of course it was inevitable that now and then some one should be equally moved to expostulate, and by coming so strenuously to his defence, Paula had grown to hold her father's tenets as a sort of religion.

Hagar had heard this broad philosophy aired, and he rigorously opposed it whenever it came up in conversation. He still held to the simple creed of his New England training, theoretically unmodified by a scrambling existence abroad, where he had got his artistic education at the peril of his digestion, and his few recreations at the risk of obliterating his morals. It was one of the fundamental principles of Hagar's philosophy that the woman should invariably be the man's conscience, his guardian angel, and his inspiration. If he were ever married, he was in the habit of saying, it would be to a woman who was better than himself, — a woman he could look up to. He might or might not live up to her exalted standards, but she must be on her pedestal all the same.

When the conversation took this turn, Paula became distinctly uneasy. She knew that Hagar did not endorse her views, and her love of approbation rose in arms at once.

"That is exactly like a man," she said to him one day. "You drive a Jew's bargain with a woman, expecting to receive everything and concede nothing."

"Oh, pardon me; you are mistaken," Hagar returned quickly. "I should give my wife all I had to give, — my heart and my humble fortune. I should love her very much; I should be at her feet."

"But she would be a fool, and that would not make the slightest difference to you."

"Why do you think she would be a fool?" Hagar asked, somewhat amused.

"Because men of brains invariably marry perfect imbeciles of women."

"I cannot agree with you there. I know several men of brains whose wives are not imbeciles."

He gave her a quick glance over the pools of color on his palette; and Paula bit her lip and then laughed.

"I am sure I do not pretend to be anything else," she said.

It was Hagar's turn. "That is like a woman. You take everything to have a personal meaning. But are n't we wandering from the subject? One does not naturally — use such terms in — such company." He was apt to talk in this broken way while he was painting, abrupt pauses cutting his sentences in two at any decisive stroke of the brush.

"We were talking about the ridiculous woman in this book," said Paula, tossing it from her as she spoke, — "posing for a martyr, and persistently staying with her husband after he had abandoned her twice to go to another woman, and in the mean time had offered her every possible insult and degradation before the world." Paula was aware that vehemence was not argument; but she went on excitedly, not allowing him time to speak. "You think it was virtuous and self-sacrificing and altogether exemplary of her to go on living with him, even when she loved the other man, and he loved her. *They* might have been happy together, and this brute could only make her miserable. She loathed him, do you understand? And yet you think it was her

duty to stay with him — or, rather, to stay where he left her — till he saw fit to come back; for he was sure to go away again, just as he had before. Duty!"

Hagar was not much moved by this eloquence; in fact, he entirely disapproved it, especially as coming from a woman. He got up and altered the arrangement of the window-shade before he replied, deliberately, "Well, he was her husband, and that is generally considered a pretty good reason for a woman's sticking by a man. 'Whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.'"

"Do you think God has anything to do with such a marriage as that?" Paula asked with cold scorn.

Angela, who was tending her doll, looked up at this. "Why, mamma!" she said in mild reproof.

"Angela thinks that name is never to be mentioned except in one's prayers," explained Paula, when she and Hagar had exchanged a hasty glance of amusement. "I think Nora must have put the idea into her head. My dear, mamma was not saying anything wrong; did you think she was?" She bent forward, and gave the child an impulsive embrace. "Oh, now I have tumbled her hair!" she cried. "Wait a moment till I have brushed it."

Hagar looked on while she was smoothing the wavy locks into place. "Not too sleek," he warned her. "It 's odd we should have got into that argument, is n't it? — I without a wife, or even the prospect of one, and you with a husband like Ferris."

He laughed as he spoke; but she did not reply,

and the young man involuntarily raised his eyes from the mother's hands, moving lightly and deftly over the child's head, to her face, bent down and partly in shadow. Even her throat was pink, as he could see; and a strange sort of surprise held him almost breathless for a moment. Could it be that Ferris was the sort of man Paula had been denouncing in the novel?

He took up his brush mechanically, and gazed at it ten seconds before he could have told whether the color on it was cobalt or carmine. It seemed quite incredible that a man could be cruel or even indifferent to a woman like Mrs. Ferris. She possessed the winning childlike grace and sweetness that some women keep all their lives, and which made her sometimes seem young even as compared with Angela. One could easily imagine that when the child was grown she would be a wise, and perhaps a needed counsellor to her mother.

Paula had the sort of charm that attracts men; it made her the centre of a little circle wherever she went. But then, there are any number of charming women who are not appreciated by their husbands. Hagar remembered now that Ferris had always impressed him as rather cold; and those silent, reserved men are sometimes capable of being very cruel. He had been shown more than one bruise on a pretty arm or throat, inflicted by a gentleman who passed in society as a model of good breeding. That was not in America, to be sure; and he had always been in the habit of extolling the American

husband as a creature perfect of its kind. However, there are other methods of cruelty than pinching and bruising; and Hagar said to himself that it was certain Paula had suffered in some way.

The flush had not faded from her face when she turned about and said lightly, "There, will that do?" with a final touch of one finger-tip to a stray lock of hair on Angela's temple. Hagar felt a deep sympathy for her.

He went on with his work; and Paula talked in a low voice to Angela, whom she had taken on her lap. Suddenly the young painter threw down his brush.

"I can never paint her eyes," he said.

"What do you mean?" asked Paula, involuntarily tightening her clasp about the child.

"They elude me somehow. They are too deep, too expressive; they have a quality in them that cannot be put on canvas. It is what we call 'soul,' I suppose."

Paula gazed at him in a sort of terror.

"I don't know what you mean," she said. She held the child away from her, and raising the small chin in her hand, looked into the wondering little face. "Why, her eyes are like anybody's," she cried with a forced laugh. "Did you mean — do you think — The idea of your saying such a thing! The child is perfectly well; she eats and sleeps and plays like any other child. Let me look — "

She put Angela down, and started toward the easel; but Hagar raised his hand, with a peremptory gesture.

"Stay where you are, Mrs. Ferris, if you please," he said; and Paula stopped, vexed with herself for doing so, but obeying him instinctively.

He had so little faith in his authority, however, that he had taken the precaution to draw his brush across the utter failure he had made. Then he proceeded to put up his colors.

"I am going to ask you to give me some tea, Mrs. Ferris, if you will be so kind," he said. "I don't believe I am in the mood for work to-day."

Paula stood where he had arrested her, regarding him with a cold and searching gaze. As he glanced up, she turned away, and held out her hands to Angela.

"Come and kiss mamma, and then go and tell Nora to get you ready for your walk."

When the child had left the room, her mother turned and confronted the young painter.

"Tell me exactly what you think. Do you think she is going to die?"

"Why, Mrs. Ferris!" Hagar exclaimed in astonishment. He saw that she was pale and that her lip trembled, and he hastened to place a chair for her. "How could you think of such a thing? The idea never entered my head. I was thinking only of my own stupidity in failing so completely to reproduce what I saw. I cannot forgive myself for even unintentionally alarming you."

"But her eyes are different from other children's," persisted the mother. "They have the look you spoke of. I have seen it myself. Oh, what should

I do if I should lose her? — the only creature in the world who cares for me!" She turned her head away; her hands locked themselves together tightly in her lap. Hagar saw the tears chase one another down the delicate oval of her cheek.

Again he was silenced for a moment, not knowing what to say. "I hope she will be spared to you for many years," he said at last, very gently. "I certainly believe she will be. She is not nearly so delicate looking as she was when I began the portrait. I shall have to round out the lines of her face before I get through."

"Oh, shall you?" cried Paula, joyfully, turning her head quickly, and looking up at him.

The change in her countenance was like that of an April sky, — a burst of sunshine after a dash of rain. The tears were still wet upon her lashes; and Hagar felt an unexpected, sweeping, and almost irresistible temptation to kiss them away. He put down the unlawful desire by a strong effort of will, and devoted his energies to hustling his tubes into the box; while Paula pulled out her handkerchief, and hurriedly dried her eyes. The little episode had brought them very near together, and the flash of sympathy between them affected her like wine. She dismissed her alarm, and began to ridicule herself for her morbid anxiety. Her present feeling was apt to be a reaction from its predecessor.

They went down into the library together, and Paula brought the tea-things herself and prepared tea. She was more animated than usual; and Hagar

followed the movements of her graceful, loosely robed figure with his eyes, thinking how brave she was,— a beautiful woman, whose marriage was a bitter disappointment, and who had only her child to live for.

Down town in his office, Ferris, tilted back in his chair, was listening, with such patience as he could command, to a wearisome recital of marital infelicity, brought about by a long-continued dissension over the root of all evil. The electric cars, crunching by under his windows, set up an unpleasant vibration in the top of his head; and through the rasping rise and fall of his client's voice, a nursery rhyme that he had read to Angela repeated itself over and over to his mental hearing, —

> "My little old man and I fell out.
> I'll tell you what 't was all about:
> He had money, and I had none;
> And that 's the way the quarrel begun."

The sharp, sour face of the woman was so distasteful to him, and her grievances so common and so commonplace, that Ferris could hardly control his sympathies to advise her with the kindness that she was really in need of. But he sent her away with new motives for endurance, which had not occurred to her too sympathizing friends; with more compassion and charity for the man's avarice, and less sentimental pity for herself. He reminded her that marriage, like life, is not smooth sailing over a summer sea, and that, after all, one's own happiness is not perhaps the thing most to be desired. He suggested

some small amenities, by which she might hope to soften the obdurate nature with which she had to deal, — sentiments that might appeal to him, considerations that might move him; and he counselled her, above all, to cultivate patience, that she might bear to the end with the weakness and the hardness of the man she had promised to cherish through good and through ill, till death should part them.

When he had closed the door upon her, Ferris returned to his arm-chair, and sat down, tilting it back in his favorite position. He felt his own perplexities to be more baffling than any that had ever been offered him for solution. That Paula was not happy he perceived clearly. Their marriage had been a mistake; he was all too sure of that. The twelve years' difference in their ages was the only cause he could discover for their lack of congeniality; and yet there must be something deeper than that to mar their union so completely. The remedy of separation, little as he had learned by his experience as a lawyer to approve of it, sometimes seemed to him the only means by which Paula's happiness could be secured; but the thought of that gave him such pain that he could hardly harbor it even for her sake. They did not quarrel, at least, and Paula had her own way in everything.

Ferris walked up and down the room with his hands in his pockets, thinking until his mind refused to act. The electric cars went thumping and crashing and humming by outside, their hideous noise making itself a part of the confusion in his brain.

His nerves were in the state somewhat corresponding to the weary muscles of a swimmer when he feels that he shall soon be obliged to surrender his body to the mercy of the waves. If he had been a woman, he might have found relief in tears; but that solace is denied to men.

He took his hat and went out to lunch. He was a noticeable person in the street, not because of his figure, for he was hardly above the medium height, and only heavy enough to escape spareness. His face was clear-cut and pale. He wore no beard nor mustache, and his black hair was cut close. His shoulders were square, and he walked with a quick, nervous step.

At a quiet *café*, known only to men, he met one or two congenial friends. They envied Ferris his professional prosperity, his comfortable fortune, and his handsome wife. In this blind way do we go through life, seeing our own troubles through magnifying lenses, and coveting the fortunes of those who are in reality less enviable than ourselves.

CHAPTER III

IN CONFIDENCE

THE winter sunshine streamed in at the library windows, lying on the rich, dull colors of the Persian rugs and the costly upholsteries and hangings. It filtered through the bank of ferns, which rose tier above tier on the plant-stand, carrying into the room a pervading tinge of their vivid green. Two women sat before the fire, where they had drawn their big, comfortable chairs for the mere æsthetic pleasure of watching the flames, rather than for warmth. A big bowl of white and red carnations stood upon the table; their fragrance mingled with that of a bunch of Russian violets which Mrs. Ferris's visitor wore upon her breast.

"You have been in love so many times, Grace," said Paula, "that really I don't think I am to blame if I cannot enter quite so enthusiastically into this one as I might have been able to a year ago."

"But this is different, Mrs. Ferris; you don't know."

"Oh, yes; I suppose so," laughed Paula. "Every love affair is different from every other, and the latest is always supreme."

"I think you are too bad," said Miss Maury, pouting.

The pout was becoming, and it is quite possible the young lady was aware of it. She was a small, slender person, with dark hair and a colorless complexion. She was not exactly pretty, but that did not matter; for in various ways she was more effective than mere prettiness can make a girl. She carried her head like a pert young sparrow, and looked at the world from a pair of incredulous black eyes, that had a brilliant surface gleam in them like those of a bird. She had, in fact, little faith in anything except her own love-affairs, which she always took as seriously as if nothing of the kind had ever happened before, but which she aired so openly that nobody but herself believed in them.

Paula was familiar with most of these interesting episodes. It was one of her delightful characteristics that she was willing to be anybody's confidante. She understood Grace far better than Grace understood herself, in respect to these same *affaires du cœur;* but the girl was bright and interesting and likable, without being in the least affectionate. Paula often told her that she would never wear out, because she had no emotions. She was always in love, to be sure; but that of itself tends to keep a woman young.

She never fretted even when she was owing her dressmaker, her milliner, and her laundress; though Paula, to whom any sort of unfulfilled indebtedness was like a clanking chain about her neck, had more than once insisted upon lending her money to discharge these obligations. Miss Maury was never

ill and apparently never tired, and she was almost invariably good-humored. She had plenty of relations, more fortunate than herself in possessing the good things of this world. They never troubled themselves about her existence; but she did not abuse them for that. She said her cousins, though they rode in their coupé, and went to Europe every summer, were all fools; and she thanked God for brains enough to earn her own living, — a thing which not one of them could have done for herself. She liked Paula, because she was pretty to look at and worth talking to, and still more because she could run on about herself by the hour, and be sure Paula was listening.

When she entered the house, everything belonging to it sank into an implied insignificance; the chair upon which she threw her wraps apparently existed only for that office. She filled the room she was in with an all-pervading egoism. Even Paula felt something go out of her, as if the mechanism that usually moved her had ceased to work. In fact, she became for the time being merely a sluiceway for Miss Maury's confidences to run in; her own life, her interests, her thoughts, feelings, and pursuits were as unknown to the young egoist as if Paula had lived in another planet. The girl was more interesting to herself than any other subject could be, and she pursued her favorite topic with all the ardor of the specialist. She never paid Angela the smallest attention.

"It does not seem quite the thing, does it?" Paula

continued, — "a young lady going alone to visit an actor in his own rooms."

"Oh, when you put it in that way, dear Mrs. Ferris! But nothing is improper that the 'Babbler' asks me to do. It was the 'Babbler' who called upon Mr. Stonehenge, and not Miss Maury, you know."

"Then it was the 'Babbler' who fell in love with him, I suppose."

"Oh, I wish it had been!" Grace answered, lifting her eyes to the ceiling.

Paula laughed outright.

"Grace, you are too absurd. Do you never lose faith in these fancies of yours? After so many disillusionments too! The moment a man is really at your feet you begin to tire of him; and when he fails to prostrate himself, it is even worse, — you positively hate him then."

"Detest him, loathe him, despise him!" cried Miss Maury, vehemently, clinching her small hands, and pursing her mouth viciously. "But did n't I have a sweet revenge on George Q. Brown? Did n't I manage so that his speech should get in too late for the morning 'Babbler,' and was n't he disgusted when he got the fifty copies he had ordered to send away to his friends? And did n't I pretend to be awfully sorry?" She gave a little shriek of spiteful laughter that made the globes on the chandeliers ring.

> "Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned;
> Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned,"

repeated Paula, deliberately.

"Yes, that is perfectly true," replied Grace, with the utmost seriousness. "You can always trust me to be a fury when occasion requires."

"But, tell me, is there really anything to this affair?"

"Oh, I had not finished! You see, last Thursday Mr. Devolle asked me to go and interview Stonehenge. At first I did not wish to go. I felt — well, somewhat as you do — that it was not quite the correct thing. But Mr. Devolle convinced me; he even made me feel very silly and prudish, you know, to have looked at it in that way. He said that when I took up the work of newspaper reporting I laid aside my own personality, and became merely the representative of the paper, — which is quite true. And he said, too, that in these days a woman's dignity and reserve can take her anywhere, — which is, of course, also true. But I could not admit the force of his arguments all at once, though I call my perceptions rather quick, you know, Mrs. Ferris; and when he still saw that I hesitated a little, he said, 'Well, I suppose I could send Raser.' Now, I do not love Raser; and as for giving him the opportunity to write up Stonehenge, — well, of course you understand, Mrs. Ferris, that there is a great deal of professional feeling — rivalry, perhaps you would call it — among the members of the staff. Of course, I am *glad* to have the 'Babbler' do good work, but I want to do the best of it myself. And when I came to think over what Mr. Devolle had said, I was actually ashamed that I had advanced any objection. I

did n't want to say too much about it, — and, indeed, he admitted himself that my feeling was perfectly natural, and that he respected me for it; but he said he thought I might trust him not to ask me to do anything unladylike. I think, do you know, that he was just a little bit hurt that I should have taken it that way."

"Perhaps he was," said Paula, perceiving that some comment was expected of her.

"So I went to the Parker House, and sent up my card to Mr. Stonehenge. I decided to wear the black hat; I know you always say you like me best in the toque, but everybody else thinks the hat more becoming. Well, I wore the hat. Mr. Stonehenge sent for me to come up, and up I went. He was alone, in the most becoming smoking-jacket of dark-blue velvet, finished with just the tiniest silver cord. You know the 'Screecher' said he always wore a wig. It is absolutely false, and I took pains to deny it in my headings. I could see where his hair was brushed back at the temples, — you know I am pretty cute about such things. He was perfectly delightful, so cordial, — at least he was to me. I happen to know that the 'Screecher' did n't get a very warm reception. Of course Mr. Devolle knows I can make twice as much capital out of an interview as anybody else on the paper, and that is why he sends me. People are always nice to me, — I don't know why." She looked at Paula with a guileless smile.

Paula smiled in return, but rather absently. She

had made a half-engagement to go to Hagar's studio that morning and look at some arrangements of drapery which he wished her opinion upon before putting in the background to Angela's portrait. It was half-past ten, and Miss Maury had "just run in" half an hour ago. She would not even take off her jacket, she was in such a frightful hurry; but the story was not finished yet.

"He showed me his collection of photographs, a very fine one, embracing all the lights of the profession; a perfect Milky Way of stars, as I said in my article, — you see the play upon words, Mrs. Ferris? — yes. He has autograph portraits of ever so many of the great actors, — Irving, Coquelin, Bernhardt, — and so many charming anecdotes to tell of them. But, oh, Mrs. Ferris, he is so handsome! You have seen him only on the stage, and you cannot possibly imagine what it is to sit and talk with him, so near to those wonderful eyes. Oh!" cried Miss Maury, shaking her head as if words were useless. "And his mouth, — it is like the Doryphorus; I said so in my article."

"Mr. Stonehenge ought to have rewarded you well with tickets," said Paula, dryly.

"Oh, I have a box for to-morrow night! One of the things I came for this morning was to ask you if you would go with me. And he sent me yesterday the most beautiful basket of flowers, — oh, the loveliest pink hyacinths!"

"Do you think he is really interested?" Paula asked a little curiously.

"Well, what should you say, Mrs. Ferris?" demanded the girl. "He has certainly shown me the most marked attention, and in a very short space of time, — the flowers and the order for the box, you know; and then — he has asked me to a little supper after the theatre to-morrow night."

"But you are not going, surely?" However unconventional we may think ourselves, we seldom dare trust our friends to put our principles in practice.

"Indeed I am. Do you think I would miss it? I am having a new waist made to my blue velvet gown, cut half low, with jet round the neck. It is going to be awfully becoming, with Jack roses, you know." Miss Maury was not eminently tasteful in dress; but in a young person her sort of egotism is almost always amusing, especially when the recipient of the confidences is, like Paula, indulgently inclined.

"I hope you will have a good time, dear; only don't — I mean, do be discreet."

"Oh, you may trust me!" replied Miss Maury, with a shrewd nod. "It is all right. I have looked out for the proprieties. Mr. and Mrs. Burns are invited, and I shall go with them. I positively must be leaving you, Mrs. Ferris; you 'll go to the play with me, won't you?"

"I am afraid I must decline, thank you. I have an engagement, — two, in fact."

"Oh, what a pity!" said Miss Maury, with rather perfunctory regret.

When she was gone, Paula went to her room. It was almost eleven o'clock. She dressed herself

rather hastily, but carefully, too; though she had an uneasy feeling that in her instinctive desire to please Hagar, she was no better than Grace, and perhaps, — yes, certainly, a little worse, being a married woman.

She deliberately rejected the gown she had at first taken down, — a becoming costume of light fawn, heavily trimmed with sable, — and chose instead a simple gown of dark blue, over which she put on a short sealskin jacket. She had made a list of purchases, which she calculated it would take her till one o'clock to execute, thus allowing but fifteen minutes for her stay at the studio.

The morning was crisp and clear, warm in the sun, but with a sturdy winter breeze, that brought a becoming color into Paula's cheeks as she walked down Boylston Street. The grass in the Public Garden showed a decided tinge of green, as one looked across it; the water in the pond sparkled and shone between the shrubbery. Paula, who was very dependent upon external conditions for her moods, quickly caught the spirit of the morning; and her step became more elastic, and the expression of her face grew brighter.

She found Hagar listlessly at work on the portrait of a handsome woman, in a black lace gown, the pattern of which was outlined upon the flesh-tint of her arms and shoulders. Hagar had softened the design as much as possible; but the contrast still produced a bizarre effect, decidedly offensive to the refined eye.

Paula stood looking at the picture, not at once taking the chair he had placed for her.

"Bad, is n't it?" he said. "It is strange women will do that sort of thing; but they are continually setting a painter's teeth on edge. I tried all my powers of persuasion in this case, but nothing I could say seemed to have any weight. Somebody had told her the thing was becoming, I suppose. A plain gauze, you know, would have been much more effective."

"Oh, yes," said Paula, lowering her eyelids with a shudder.

Hagar went over to the picture with an air of weary patience, and turned it face to the easel. Then he came and took a chair near the one in which Mrs. Ferris had seated herself.

"And Angela?" he questioned, smiling.

"Oh, she is well. She is as well as she can be. You gave me such a fright the other day. How could you do it?" Paula said, turning upon him a look of radiant reproach. "She is out playing in the avenue to-day, well wrapped up, of course. If I am nothing else, I am a decent sort of mother."

"Decent!" repeated the young man, with an admiring disdain. He was studying her animated face and her airy attitude, as she was poised on the edge of her chair, tapping one foot on the floor, while she twirled her portemonnaie in her gloved hand.

"Won't you lean back and rest a bit, Mrs. Ferris? I should like to see you look a little less as if you were going to skip the next minute. I dusted that

chair on purpose for you this morning. You will find it more comfortable than it looks."

"But I am going to skip the next minute," Paula said, laughing again. Nevertheless, she did as he requested. "Yes, your chair is very comfortable. I shall stay too long, I am afraid. I must go in fifteen minutes; I have a lot of errands to do down town. You had better be showing me your backgrounds, Mr. Hagar."

"Yes. There 's no hurry, certainly. Don't begin to talk of going. You don't know how good it seems to have you here. I wish I could make you a cup of tea; but I am afraid it would not be a success."

"Oh, don't speak of tea! I drink too much, as it is. Do you know, my doctor says the tea habit is getting to be a perfect curse among women? He says the afternoon tea is as much a menace to society as the saloon. He has positively ordered me to leave it off, I am getting so nervous."

"Oh, I am glad to hear it."

"But why?" said Paula, frowning at him.

"Because I have none to offer you."

His blue eyes met hers; and Mrs. Ferris colored slightly, and turned her face away. She was vexed with herself, and displeased with him; and yet neither feeling was exactly painful. Still, a blush was more or less of an admission, and altogether absurd in this case. Of course she was becoming fond of Hagar as a friend; their common interest in Angela's portrait, and their necessary meetings during the execution of it, had given them a certain

regard for each other. But he would spoil their pleasant relations if he began to look that kind of nonsense. Paula called it nonsense, because she was angry with herself for having been so silly as to blush.

"I can offer you wafers and olives," Hagar was saying.

"Thank you very much; I don't think I will eat anything. Were you thinking of that crimson curtain for Angela?"

"But, Mrs. Ferris, just to please me," he persisted, ignoring the question. "I happen to know that you are fond of olives; and some of these wafers, — they are as thin as paper."

He brought them with a boy's eagerness, and set them down beside her on a corner of the table, flanking the box of biscuit with another of preserved ginger, and adding a bottle of Chianti to the group.

Paula accepted a wafer with an air of condescension, but refused the olives. She would not look at her host, but gazed about the studio with a patronizing interest, taking small, perfunctory bites.

"No; it is something very different from a crimson curtain I wish to put into Angela's portrait," Hagar said. "I should like, if possible, to think of something a little less hackneyed than drapery, without having straight lines. I had thought of letting in a shaft of light from above with a cloudy background, say of dull green, the light just touching her hair, and forming a sort of halo about the head —"

"I should not like that at all," interrupted Paula, sharply, her face changing. "Why, she would look like a saint in a stained-glass window! You are determined to make her out a supernatural sort of being, Mr. Hagar, — a perfectly healthy child, who ought to be painted with a doll in her arms, and a trundle-hoop on the ground beside her. I wonder you do not give her wings!"

"Pray forgive me, Mrs. Ferris," Hagar said humbly. "It seems to be my misfortune to offend you. But I think you mistake my meaning sometimes; you certainly are a little unjust to me in this case."

"Then it is you who must forgive me," she replied, giving him a brilliant smile.

She had said to herself that she must not smile at him in that way again; but she was truly sorry for having hurt him, and it is so difficult to strike the balance between a cold formality and a too warm friendliness; at least, it is always difficult when it is not perfectly simple.

"Well, I will think it over," she went on; "but how would this do? A little green — a jardinière of ferns or palms — against a pale yellow wall, the sunlight coming from one side and falling warm upon the floor. With her velvet frock she would contrast well with the background, and the effect would be bright and cheerful, not suggestive of — of — "

"I see what you mean, Mrs. Ferris. If I am clever enough to carry it out, it ought to be very good indeed. I only hope my execution will be equal to your conception. You ought to have been an artist."

"Now you are making fun of me. I am deeply offended," said Paula, lifting her chin. They looked at each other and laughed.

"Shall we call it square? And, Mrs. Ferris, will you please eat an olive?"

"Yes, I will. I believe I am hungry. No, don't open the wine, — at least, not for me. But I will take another wafer, — thank you. Oh, and you must have something too! It is horrid eating alone."

They lunched as happily as two children after a quarrel, — Paula with a generous appetite, that contrasted somewhat amusingly with the reluctant air with which she had taken her first wafer.

"Of course you are going to Mrs. Garrowell's ball," she said, biting into her sixth olive.

"Are you?"

"I asked you first."

"Well, I don't know. It depends."

"When are you likely to decide?"

"At nine o'clock on Friday night, probably, if something does not determine it sooner. Should I find you there?"

"Oh, I suppose so! I shall go late, — I always do. You know I fairly despise those things; but when I am once inside them, I get drawn into the whirlpool, and am as giddy as the veriest schoolgirl. The next day I am so vexed with myself."

"It is the other way with me. I expect to enjoy myself, and am invariably bored. I suppose it is owing to my Puritan bringing-up. When I was a boy, I was never allowed to go to any sort of party

or entertainment, except sewing-circles and prayer-meetings; and so for a long time any form of dissipation seemed to me like heaven to a lost soul. Now that I can do just as I please, I keep the old hankering for forbidden delights, though I long ago discovered for myself that social pleasures were all alike and all empty."

"Yes; are they not? If we could live simply, and if, instead of wasting our time with people whom we care nothing for and who care nothing for us, we could seek the society of those who were truly congenial, how different life would be! I used to hear my father talk about that so beautifully. Can you imagine such a state of things?" She turned her sparkling eyes toward him.

"I can, indeed," he said slowly.

"Then we might be natural. Instead of that, we are all artificial. In my whole day I do hardly anything that I should really choose to do, except visit my poor people, and play with Angela. I am answering notes, paying calls, drinking tea (and ruining my nerves), going to those tiresome Symphonies —"

"Mercy on us, what heresy!" interrupted Hagar, with a burst of laughter.

"My calling the Symphonies tiresome? For this reason. I sit in my seat, with people chattering and rustling all about me, — fashionable young ladies, who never can go anywhere without their box of Huyler's, and the men they know, who are forever turning up, no matter where one goes. In front of me, a person with the score, which he is all the time

turning; on one side, a woman who is perpetually laying off and putting on her furs; on the other, a woman who coughs in my face. Behind me, the girls with the chocolates, whispering all through the *adagios* and *lentos:* 'Oh, there 's ——, the violinist; see, with the roll of music under his arm. Dick says he looks like a Bologna sausage, he 's so brown and fat. I hate a fat man, don't you? There is ——; and say, is n't that the fur she had on her last winter's cloak? I told mamma I thought it was the same. Oh, look at ——, the light-haired one in the front row! Is n't he just lovely? Honestly, I 'm dead gone over him; but don't say anything for the world, will you? Have another chocolate almond, dear; they 're awfully nice — ' And so on."

"It must be a dreadful experience."

"Next year I shall have tickets for Saturday evening, when the genuine music-lovers go. But oh, I could listen to that orchestra! If they were playing in my parlor in the twilight, and I could creep downstairs just a little way, and then curl up by myself, and sit with my chin in my hand, and shut my eyes and listen, — oh, that would be to enjoy it! That is the way I should always like to hear music."

"Always alone?"

"Oh, I might like to have Angela with me," Paula said with a light laugh.

"Always Angela," said Hagar, under his breath. "Mrs. Ferris, won't you have another bit of the ginger?"

"Not a speck more, — no, indeed. How could you

let me run on so, Mr. Hagar? What time can it be?" She gave a little shriek, as she looked at the toy watch hanging at her side. "Half-past twelve! And I have not time to go down town. Why did you not remind me that I was overstaying my fifteen minutes?"

"How should I have known it?" he answered shamelessly.

"Well, give me my jacket, please," Mrs. Ferris said, standing where she had risen. He held the garment, while she slipped her arms into it, and then he pulled it up over her shoulders. Their talk over the informal lunch had brought them very near together; it was difficult at once to resume their former relations, which were more like those of two persons who had met often in society, but who had not gone beyond a certain depth of acquaintanceship. The shadow of Paula's husband always seemed to Hagar to hover over his own house; here there was no real or imaginary barrier in the way of free intercourse.

"Do not go yet," he said, as Paula was about to button her coat. "If it is too late for you to go down town, it is surely too early to start for home. I want to show you some of my work, something better than that thing on the easel."

He turned several of the canvases from their position face to the wall; among them were the head of an old peasant and one of a dark-eyed Italian boy.

"I found him in Russia," Hagar said, following Paula's look, which was fixed intently upon the old

man's face. "He is a rather rare type for that country. His features are not so blunt as most of his class, and he has a less dogged expression. The boy I picked up in Naples, of course, — that paradise of handsome young beggars."

"You might have found him at the North End," said Paula, bestowing but a slight glance upon the beautiful, conventional face. "But this man interests me. He is very picturesque. He looks a little like a cousin of my father, whom I used to see now and then when I was a child. Of course he is much older, — your subject. My cousin was, as I remember, tall and gaunt, with quick, bright eyes that seemed to see everything. He was a visionary, an enthusiast, full of theories, without the love of his kind that makes the reformer. He was out of patience with the whole world, because he could not make it see things as he did, and he went away up in the country to be rid of people. He bought a little farm, and lives in the simplest way, I have heard, sewing on his own buttons and making his bread, I dare say. I have often wished I might see him again. I liked him in spite of his piercing eyes, which rather frightened me sometimes. He knew a great deal about birds and butterflies and plants, and he used to take me on his knee and talk to me about them."

"From your description I infer that he was what we should call a crank."

"Yes, he was just that," Paula assented gravely. "My father was what people would call a crank, too;

but the world would be better if there were more like him."

Hagar turned another picture about, — the study of a young girl, with hair of reddish gold, and a soft, round cheek and chin. She was done in profile, a shadow falling heavily on the face, which was scarcely more than a silhouette against a pale yellow wall, where one small green lizard was basking.

Paula shuddered. "How could you paint the horrid thing?"

"They are everywhere in Italy," Hagar said. "I have taken them in my hand many a time; they are perfectly harmless. You would not mind them any more than you do the grasshoppers."

"You will come on Tuesday," Paula said, as he accompanied her downstairs.

"Yes; Tuesday morning at ten. Shall you be at home?"

"Of course. And I shall see you at Mrs. Garrowell's in the evening, perhaps, if you decide to go." She did not know what possessed her to say this.

"I shall be there," he returned promptly. "Will you save me a waltz, Mrs. Ferris?"

"Oh, I cannot promise," replied Paula, with an air of indifference. She bade him good-by, without looking at him again.

CHAPTER IV

AT MRS. GARROWELL'S

They were rather less talkative than usual, while Hagar worked busily on Tuesday morning. Mrs. Ferris had suffered somewhat from self-reproach since her visit to the studio, and the young painter was feeling the depressing influence of the house where Paula's husband was lord and master.

He did not yet admit to himself that he was in love with Paula; but their free and delightful intercourse of two days before had given him a standard by which he must judge all future meetings, and Paula's manner, carefully courteous to-day, awakened in him a dull sense of injury. She was very pleasant; but her smile was listless and formal, and she seldom spoke, except when he volunteered some remark. She did not even talk with Angela so much as usual, but sat with an arm about her, silently stroking the little girl's hair with her hand.

As the morning wore away, Hagar found himself growing more and more indisposed for work. His hand was not steady; but he kept on, doing what he knew would have to be painted out again next time he came. Once he sat so long looking absently at his canvas that the child said, —

"What? What is it, Mr. Hagar? Is my picture wrong?" and glancing up, he surprised Paula's eyes fixed upon him with something like the look she was accustomed to give only to Angela. She dropped her lids immediately, and fell to stroking the child's hair again.

"Shall I see you at Mrs. Garrowell's to-night?" he asked, as he was putting up his brushes.

"I think not."

He looked up quickly, a mute questioning in his eyes.

"I am not feeling well," Paula said rather stiffly; "I have a headache, and my throat is a little sore." She shivered slightly.

"Mamma is cold," said Angela, who was holding her mother's hand. "Her hand is cold, — is n't it, mamma? Feel her hand, Mr. Hagar, and see if it is n't like ice."

But Paula drew it away from the warm, clinging fingers, and stooping, took the child up in her arms.

"You ought not to lift her; she is too heavy," Hagar said. "If you are not going, I am not," he added in a lower tone. A sort of dull flush had overrun his face.

"You will do as you think best, of course."

"Mrs. Ferris, how have I offended you?" The young man came a step nearer.

"Offended me?"

"Yes. You are not the same that you were the other day."

"Why should I be?" she demanded, with an

assumption of cold surprise. "Am I under any obligation to be the same to-day that I was yesterday, or the same to-morrow that I am to-day?"

"No; you are under no obligation whatever," he answered, standing before her, where she had seated herself on the broad window-seat, with Angela beside her, forming letters with a wet finger-tip on the glass. "But we are friends?"

She kept her eyelids down. "You are painting Angela's portrait," she said guardedly.

He turned away. "Thank you for reminding me." But in his tone there was no trace of resentment, or even of coldness. He could not be angry with her, seeing her lip quiver, and hearing the tremble in her voice. He did not allude again to the evening; but he made up his mind to go on the chance of finding her there.

At dinner, Paula asked her husband if he would take her to Mrs. Garrowell's reception. Ferris gave a start of surprise. "I had entirely forgotten the engagement," he said, looking at his wife across the low, silver-leaved fern that stood in the middle of the table. "I have made an appointment to meet Willington at the club. Do you mind going without me?"

"Of course I should much prefer having an escort. Is the appointment so very binding?"

"It happens to be this time — yes. It is a business engagement. I am very sorry."

When the servant had gone out of the room, Paula said, dropping her voice, —

"I ought to be used to going out alone, I suppose; but somehow I am not. We are hardly seen together oftener than Olive and Mr. Goring. Of course I do not mind going by myself now and then, but it is not pleasant to be *expected* to appear without my husband."

Just then the maid re-entered the room, and Ferris had no opportunity to reply; but when they had gone into the library, after dinner, he said, —

"I think I am rather out of place at a dancing-party, Paula, — a man who does n't dance."

"You waltzed beautifully when I first knew you."

"Yes; but I was younger then. One cannot always be young," said Ferris, with a brief sigh.

"No, if one chooses to grow old."

"I am turning gray, Paula."

"That is nothing. Plenty of people are gray before they are thirty. Olive's hair is beginning to turn a little, and she is only two years older than I."

"It is not always years that bring the signs of age."

"No," responded Paula, slowly. "It is often care, or grief, or hopelessness. To have made a great mistake, and to know that it is irreparable, that the whole current of life is changed by it and can never be turned back; and worse yet, to know that another life is spoiled too, — that is what cuts lines in the face, and makes the hair turn white. The time is coming when we shall all be gray and wrinkled."

Ferris took his cigar from his mouth, and let his

elbow rest on his knee, as he sat looking into the fire. Paula was beside him, so near that he could have touched the folds of her gown; but in thought and feeling, what worlds away! The firelight sparkled on the cut steel with which her slipper was embroidered, and on the jewels with which the fingers were adorned that were clasped about her knee. Ferris had placed them there. Every one of them was a perfect stone, without the slightest flaw; yet he would have paid their price ten times over, if they could have brought her happiness.

"I am sorry for Olive," he said slowly, as if he were thinking of something else.

"I am sorry for her, and for every one who is unhappy. A home where there is no love is a desolate place."

"Paula," said Ferris, abruptly, "is there anything you want? Have you plenty of money on hand? You are always so afraid of asking for anything, and I am apt to be thoughtless." He felt in his pocket and took out a roll of crisp, new bills, which he dropped into her lap. "I saw a handsome toilet-set of *repoussé* that came from Tiffany's to-day. Thornton had just brought it home to his wife. May I order one like it for you? Should you like it?"

"Oh, no; do not. I have one already, you know, — the one you gave me last Christmas; don't you remember?"

"But it is well enough to have a change. You must get tired of seeing the same things on your

toilet-table day after day. And why do you not get some new clothes? Have you a fresh costume for to-night?"

"No," replied Paula, laughing in spite of herself. "When you begin to talk about dress, Roger, you are really very funny. As if I needed a new gown every time I go out!"

"It is not what you need," Ferris answered seriously. "It is what you would like. All women like pretty things to wear, — they ought to if they do not; and every man wishes his wife to dress well."

"Do I disgrace you?" She turned to him, with a bright smile softening her eyes, and curling the corners of her lips. She was vain enough to know that the question was absurd.

"Disgrace me!" He made a sudden movement, as if he would have taken her hand, but checked himself with a sigh. He continued to study her face after she had turned it away, and the dreamy sadness had settled upon it again. At last he rose abruptly, and took two or three turns about the room.

Presently he came and laid one hand upon her chair.

"I want you to be happy if I can make you so, Paula. I want you to have everything you wish for, — everything."

"But I do not need this," she said, holding up the money. "I have plenty upstairs; you know you gave me some only the day before yesterday."

"Keep it until you do need it, then. Spend it for trifles, — things you do not need. Fritter it away, if you can get the least pleasure out of doing that; or give it to your poor people. I want you to do just as you please in everything, Paula."

He took her wrist lightly in his fingers, and laid the hand back in her lap; then he stooped and just touched her cheek with his lips. "Good-night, if I should not see you again. I hope you will have a pleasant evening at Mrs. Garrowell's. I wish I were ten years younger for your sake; but as I am not, — you can dance without me." He was gone before she had time to speak.

Hagar dressed for the evening, half in a feverish expectation, half in the sickening fear that Paula would keep her word and not show herself at the party. Even after the conversation of the morning, he tried to pretend to himself that whether she were there or not, it would be very much the same to him. Of course, Mrs. Ferris added interest to any gathering. She was sure to be well dressed; and her beauty, animation, and brilliancy made her an ornament and an attraction wherever she went. Hagar's artistic eye experienced a sense of peace and repose when it fell upon her, just as the ear feels gratefully a strain of harmony after discordant sounds. She was almost the only woman he knew who could always be trusted to dress at once artistically and becomingly. Her waist was not shaped by a corset, yet there was nothing aggressively suggestive of dress-reform about her figure. Hagar hated the pinched waists and the crowded-up busts and shoul-

ders he was forced to paint. The flat, broad, wooden-looking backs he sometimes saw in the streets offended his taste quite as deeply. Paula dressed in such a way that the outlines of her figure were never quite defined, but every movement was free and graceful. She waltzed as a woman whose hips are trammelled by a corset can never waltz.

Hagar wandered about the spacious house for half an hour or more before he saw any sign of her. He had come rather late, and the rooms were crowded. Dancing had begun; but he had as yet made no attempt to secure a partner. Whatever baseless fabric of a tale he might be obliged to invent for the purpose, he meant, if Paula did not soon appear, to make some excuse to his hostess and get away from the house.

At last, as he was standing by himself in the hall, he chanced to raise his eyes to the staircase, and beheld Paula descending. She was all in pale yellow, with a girdle and chatelaine of Roman gold, and a long cable of the same wound again and again about her throat. Her hair was dressed as usual, parted straight from crown to brow, and brushed as close as it would stay to the small head, down to where it was twisted tightly at the nape of her neck, and fastened with two long gold pins. Her arms were bare from the polished shoulder half-way to her elbow, below which the long gloves covered them; but the neck was partly concealed by a chemisette of yellow gauze to match the gown, drawn up and tied with a narrow ribbon. Mrs. Ferris never *dressed décolleté.*

Paula's hand rested on the broadcloth arm of a young man. He was not a handsome young man; and Hagar's heart, beating rather thickly with the realization of his hopes, did not hurry any faster because of Dimmont, though Paula was giving all her attention to her escort, and was apparently unaware of Hagar's presence.

Dimmont was fair almost to an Albino whiteness of hair and eyebrows, with pink cheeks, a small mustache, and a high, thin, and rasping voice. His nose, in its abrupt ascent, drew his upper lip after it in a way that made Dimmont's smile something one needed to have been prepared for; and his small, deep-set, greenish-gray eyes twinkled with a contagious merriment. Such a face as Dimmont's could never have been planned; it could only have happened. He was always laughing, and had every appearance of taking both himself and life as a practical joke.

As the two passed Hagar on their way to the ball-room, Paula glanced up and bowed slightly. Little as this could be in the way of satisfaction, Hagar preferred it to one of the ordinary conventional greetings with which she was making her way past groups of people whom she knew. It was different from those she gave the rest, and that was something.

He waited patiently until she had danced twice with Dimmont and once with their host, and then he joined the little circle that had gathered about her in one of the pauses of the music. Mrs. Goring was there, with her hand slipped through Paula's arm; and she gave the young painter a cordial greeting.

"Oh, Mr. Hagar, I am so glad to see you! I want to ask you how Angela's portrait is coming on. Mrs. Ferris will not tell me. She says she 'does not know,'—as if I should believe that!"

"If Mrs. Ferris has obeyed my instructions," Hagar said, "she really does not know. She has not seen the picture since it was first begun."

"If she has obeyed—" cried Olive, staring at him in affected consternation, and shaking her friend's arm gently. "Paula, do you hear? Mr. Hagar is talking about you; he is saying dreadful things about obedience. Obedience and Paula do not go together, Mr. Hagar."

Paula, who was talking to an elderly man on her left, half turned her head and smiled slightly, without interrupting her conversation.

"As if Paula pretended to mind anybody, even her husband!" Olive cried.

"It was an inadvertent expression of mine, Mrs. Goring," Hagar said, in his society voice and manner. "I had forgotten that obedience has taken its place among the obsolete virtues!"

"You had better remember!" Olive gave him a trenchant look. "We are all Fatimas, when it comes to a forbidden room. We deny it, of course, and feign to have no curiosity, but it is only a pretence."

"You alarm me, Mrs. Goring. I shall feel it necessary to take the picture home with me hereafter." He glanced at Paula, but still she did not turn her head. The music started up just then, and

she moved away on the arm of her partner. Hagar led out Mrs. Goring, feeling as much alone in the assembly as if Paula were miles away.

The evening was half over, and he had danced but twice. He had taken Miss Cushing, the younger sister of his hostess, into the supper-room, where he had watched Mrs. Ferris being waited upon by three or four eager attendants, and where he had eaten nothing himself. His companion — a pretty, young girl, quite absorbed in the delight of mere existence — followed his eyes as they dwelt upon Paula, and interpreted at least a fragment of his thought.

"I see you are admiring Mrs. Ferris too, Mr. Hagar. Isn't she lovely? Do you know, I think she is the prettiest woman in Boston! I never saw anybody else but Mrs. Kendal who looked really pretty with her hair parted; it is the most trying style, in my opinion. I attempted it once, — *just* once, — quite by myself, you understand, with not even my maid in the room. Well, I have never had the same respect for myself since."

"Indeed!" said Hagar, smiling. Next to being with Paula, it was pleasant to hear her charms extolled.

"No, I have not. But do you think Mrs. Ferris is exactly — well, happy? Do you know, I have fancied that sometimes she looks a little sad? Her husband is very nice, very handsome for a dark man; but they seldom go anywhere together, — have you noticed? You see, he is not here to-night."

Hagar did not reply. By the slightest lift of her dainty chin, and a lowering of her eyelids, Paula had summoned him. He transferred his charge to Dimmont, who happened to be passing, and made his way to Mrs. Ferris's side.

"Oh, will you please take me where it is cooler?" she said, putting her hand through his arm. "I have eaten nothing but an ice, and still I am so warm. No, not into the conservatory; upstairs, I think, where there are not so many people."

They found a retired place in Mrs. Garrowell's boudoir, which was dimly lighted with a shaded lamp; and Hagar opened the window just a crack to let in a breath of the cool, frosty night air.

He sat down near her, and their eyes met. It was quite accidental, as such meetings are apt to be, which neverthless produce the effect of a lightning-flash, with its attendant burst of thunder. Both experienced a certain shock, and for a minute neither spoke.

Paula reached out and drew toward her a bowl of roses that stood on the table by her side. A slight tremor shook her hands, as she moved them about among the great crimson buds and glossy leaves. Hagar sat looking at the carpet, tracing its design with the toe of his patent-leather shoe.

"Have you found the evening agreeable?" Paula asked, at last, in a matter-of-fact tone.

He did not look up as he answered, "No; at least, not until now."

She glanced quickly at the doorway. "It is a

delightful party. It must have cost a great deal of money. Did you notice the orchids?"

"No; I did not." He raised himself, and leaned back in his seat, watching her from under his eyelids as she played with the roses, inhaling their perfume one after another. At that moment he recognized, with a sudden overthrow of the proprieties, the fact that he loved her. Well, and what then? Nothing, of course, except that it was useless to make commonplace efforts to disguise it. She knew it, without doubt, as every woman knows when she is loved.

"And you? — have you been enjoying yourself?" he asked, trying to borrow some of her nonchalance and failing.

She lifted her brows. "Oh, well enough! I do not care for this sort of thing, you know." She was wearing the mask of indifference a little askew.

"But you came?"

"Yes; because my husband had an engagement down town, and I was not in the mood to spend the evening alone. And you also changed your mind, it seems."

"Yes. I came on the chance — "

He did not finish, because she had turned her head away abruptly, and did not appear to be listening. She had picked up a volume that lay at her elbow; but she suddenly pushed it from her with an impatient frown.

"What is it?" Hagar asked.

"Oh, that odious book again!"

"The one we were discussing the other day?"

"Yes. Everybody seems to be reading it, and talking about it, and lauding its detestable theories. Oh, excuse me!" she added with a little sarcastic laugh; "I had forgotten that you wholly approved of the heroine's principles."

"I am not sure that I do — now," he said in a low voice.

"Oh! your opinions have undergone a change?" She had spoken before she realized the significance of his speech, and a quick blush followed the words.

"Yes," he answered briefly.

Paula sank back in her chair. She looked tired. The orchestra was playing a waltz with a dreamy, swaying movement, inspiring to the feet; but Paula did not stir even to tap the toe of her yellow slipper. Once in a while some one passed the doorway, and glanced curiously in. They saw Hagar on a low seat, with his elbows on his knees, and his eyes bent upon a rose that was falling to pieces in his fingers; they saw Mrs. Ferris leaning back, with her feet and hands crossed, looking straight before her at the opposite wall.

At length she started up so abruptly that Hagar lifted his head and looked at her as if he had been suddenly awakened from sleep.

"I must go down," she said, without turning her eyes in his direction. "I have missed three dances. What will my partners think? Will you give me your arm, Mr. Hagar, please?"

He offered it mechanically, and they descended

the stairs together. Paula was met by one of the anxious partners, and became her vivacious self again. She went through dance after dance without appearing to grow weary. She never once glanced at Hagar again; and when they met in one of the figures of the German, she gave him only the tips of her gloved fingers. He had not asked her for a waltz, knowing very well that the only response would be a refusal. He meant at least to see her to her carriage; but a more fortunate man performed that duty.

He did not see her again for a day or two; but late on Thursday afternoon he found himself in the neighborhood of her house. Something was drawing him to her, tugging at him with slender, invisible ropes; but he was trying to resist, — really making an effort, — for Hagar prided himself on his sense of honor, and it had always been an important clause in his code of ethics that no man should look with love upon another man's wife.

Just as he had passed the door, he came unexpectedly upon Dimmont.

"Oh, Hagar, dear fellow! Just coming away from Mrs. Ferris's? That 's exactly where I 'm bound, do you know? Thought I 'd have a cup of her famous tea before I go to my rooms to dress. See you at Mrs. Goring's dinner to-night?"

Hagar replied in the negative.

"No? Well, I believe it 's rather small. Guess they can't give much of a racket, on account of the man of the house never showing up, you know.

Awkward, of course. Did you find Mrs. Ferris at home?"

When Hagar explained that he had not made the attempt to find her, Dimmont at once took possession of his arm, and wheeled him about in the direction of Paula's door. "Then you 'll keep me company; oh, certainly, you 've no legitimate excuse, —a man without a family."

The urn was already steaming, and Mrs. Garrowell and her sister were sipping tea by the library fire. Paula, in one of her recklessly hilarious moods, was abusing the doctors for denying her tea. She was dressed very simply, with a white apron tied about her waist, and her hair was tumbled by a frolic with Angela, who stood beside her mother, leaning against her knee.

"If I pour cream into the sugar-bowl, and put tea in the cream-pitcher, you must forgive me," Paula cried. "Yes, you may laugh, if you like; but I assure you I am falling into mental decay. Actually, I forgot to remind Roger that we are going out to dinner to-night. He either will not come home at all, or he will come and tell me that he has an engagement."

Just then Ferris's key was heard in the lock.

CHAPTER V

AFTER THE DINNER

PAULA had happened in at Olive's that noon to find her swallowing a hasty lunch of toast and tea in the pantry, while the decorators were at work in the dining-room.

"Oh, why did not you come over and take lunch with me, Olive?" she said with affectionate reproach. "You are not even sitting down. You ought to be having some nice hot broth instead of that half-cold slop. You will be worn out when your dinner is over."

"I want you to see my dress," Olive interrupted, hurriedly finishing her toast. "I am afraid you won't like it. I don't know that I do myself."

She led the way upstairs. "Don't mind the worn spots in the carpet; they will all be covered up with rugs to-night, — hired for the occasion, you know."

They went into the bare, cheerless front chamber, where the gown lay across the bed. It proved to be an elaborate costume of striped material, a wide bar of black velvet alternating with one of white satin. Olive held it up against her figure. "Do you think it will be becoming? It is cut square, you see; you know I have a nice neck."

"Yes, your neck is lovely. Did Madame Marabout make the gown?" inquired Paula, conscientiously evading the direct question.

"Oh, Paula, you know well enough I could not afford her. The decorations are costing frightfully. I don't know what Horace will say when the bills come in. However, it had to be done; and when he does see the bills, it will be too late to undo it."

"And all to clinch Mrs. Garrowell. Only think what you might have done with the money! But then, if you are happier this way," Paula hastened to add, "you surely have a right to your pleasure."

"I should n't have the money any other way. Horace would lose it at cards, or spend it at suppers, Heaven knows where. Well, come down, and let us see what they are doing in the dining-room. You know I am having a caterer. I would not let our own servants have anything to do with the dinner; I was so afraid they would make a failure of something."

When they had inspected the dining-room, Olive drew her friend into the parlor, and shut the sliding-doors. Her manner had resumed its usual brisk assertiveness.

"Paula, there is something I want to say to you. You won't mind?"

Mrs. Goring had the kind of frankness that made any one who knew her turn cold when she began to speak in this way. Now, of course, Paula's thoughts instantly flew to Hagar, and the color came into her face.

Olive had taken her hands, and was holding them firmly, with the confidence that the self-appointed admonitor always displays. "It is about Mr. Hagar, and I might as well speak plainly. He is in love with you, Paula."

"Olive!" cried Mrs. Ferris, her eyes flashing. She drew her hands away, struggling like an angry child to free them from the other's clasp.

"I cannot help it if you are vexed with me," Olive said, shaking her head. "It is true, and you ought to know it, — if you do not already." She gave her friend a sharp side-glance. "I can't believe that if you *had* known it, Paula, you would have sat alone with him so long the other night at Mrs. Garrowell's, — alone, and yet where everybody could see you. You know as well as I do, how easily people are induced to talk."

"What do I care whether people talk or not?" broke out Paula. "They must keep their tongues going, I suppose; but nothing they can say affects me. I am above it; I live outside it."

"No one can live outside it. You cannot afford to have people talking about you, Paula. One idle word will do what a lifetime cannot undo. A woman whose name has been handled lightly is never the same again. I am sure of the truth of what I say. I myself have been tempted; and if any woman ever had an excuse, I have. But something keeps me, I hardly know what. You cannot trust your radical ideas, Paula. They will lead you into a quicksand from which you cannot escape. You are sincere in

your belief, I know; but you will not succeed in making the world think as you do. We may be right in theory; but so long as we live in society, we have got to conform to its rules of conduct or suffer at its hands."

"I am glad you have come to a stop, Olive," said Paula. She had grown quite pale, and her brown eyes were dark against the whiteness of her face. "I should like just to ask you by what right and for what reason you are taking it upon yourself to call my conduct in question."

"The right of a friend, — a friend who loves you. I care for but few people, as you know, Paula; but you and I are bound together by many ties. As for my reasons, look back and think a moment."

"Mr. Hagar has been with me four hours out of every week for the past two months. If he — if what you say is true, he has certainly never — never told me so."

"Told you so! I should think he would not!" cried Olive, in the ardor of a merciless rectitude. "You would never allow him to do so," she said firmly.

"No," replied Paula, in a faint voice.

"But in the language of eyes, I, at least, have lived too long to be blind to that. Why, in the few moments that I have seen you together, I have read it as plainly as if he had shouted it. Eyes are as good as ears, if one has any understanding to interpret. Can you tell me honestly, Paula, it has never occurred to you that he is interested?"

"I will not be put through a course of questioning," cried Paula. "No one but you would dare to talk to me in this way, and even from you I am not willing to bear it. You realize, of course, exactly what you are accusing me of?"

"I am not accusing you; indeed, you mistake me, if you think I am. I am only trying to put you on your guard. The wisest of us may make terrible mistakes, and I wished to warn you in season. You have everything to live for, — a husband who loves you — "

"That is the very thing that I have not," interrupted Paula.

She was trembling from head to foot. The words seemed to have come of themselves; and now they had escaped her lips, she turned cold to think that Olive had heard them. But there was a certain relief, too, in having torn off the mask of happy wifehood she had worn so long.

For a full half-minute Mrs. Goring looked at her in dumb astonishment; then practical common-sense gathered its forces, and rushed to the rescue.

"What ridiculous nonsense! Are you crazy, Paula?"

Paula bit her lips to keep back the tears that crowded at her eyelids. They were tears of nervousness and self-pity, unworthy of a woman who was at least reasonably happy as compared with the average mortal. "No, I am not crazy."

"I cannot believe it," Olive said. "No, I cannot believe it." She still sat rigid, as if she had been petrified by the shock.

"It is true, nevertheless."

Olive shook herself, and drew a long breath, as if to throw off the stupor of amazement. "Believe it? Good heavens, I should think not! A man like Roger Ferris, spotless, blameless in every way before the world."

"A man may be spotless and blameless, and yet have ceased to care for his wife, — especially when she is such an unlovable specimen of that commodity as myself. I do not blame him, you see; he has every excuse."

"There is just where it is. You imagine it. Your calling yourself unlovable is enough to show that you are talking foolishly. You know better than to say it. You are the most popular woman I know. Everybody likes you."

Paula gave a scornful laugh. "Yes, Willie Dimmont is popular too."

"No woman ever had a more indulgent husband," Olive went on, taking no notice of this speech. "Roger is as proud of you as he can be. You have only to ask for a thing, and it is yours, from a silver hairpin to a new victoria. He lets you carry out every caprice, no matter how much it costs; he is the most generous and unselfish of men. If it is true that he does not love you as he might, it is partly your fault, Paula, — I must say it. You ought to let him know that you love him. You are cold in your manner to him, — yes, you are; I have observed it myself. I have seen you draw back when he came near you, and I have seen his face

change. While a woman has power to hurt a man, he is not indifferent to her. When he comes and goes without seeing her any more than if she were a useless piece of furniture, then she may know that she does not interest him any longer. Oh, Paula, if I had what you have, how happy I could be!"

"You are very wise, no doubt, Olive; but in this case you are not fully informed. Roger has entirely ceased to care for me. It is plain to me in everything he says and does, or rather, in everything he fails to say and do. Have you noticed how seldom he goes anywhere with me now? He is always making one excuse and another. Of course if he wished to go, he could do so well enough. We see each other almost as rarely as if we lived in different houses. Sometimes we do not meet at all during the day."

"Whose fault is that?" put in Olive, sharply.

"Mine, probably. You would say so. But if he does not care for my society, I am not going to thrust it upon him. He is generous, as you say, — he has all the virtues. He gives me everything I wish for, because he likes me to make a good appearance. That is a man's pride, — to have his house and his horses, his wife and children, compare well with his neighbors'. But as for loving, he does not care a straw for me. He is cold and deliberate; I am warm and impulsive. We are wholly unlike. There is probably nothing I do that he does not disapprove; as for me, I cannot understand him. If a man has any feeling, he must show it sometimes."

"He has plenty of feeling for Angela."

"Yes; on that side his nature is open. Some men are very fond of their children, when they are quite indifferent to their wives. Why am I talking of this?" she cried suddenly, springing to her feet. "See what you have made me do, — tell you what I never meant to tell any one. Have I ever complained of my husband to you, ever by even a look given you to understand that he was not all in all to me, until to-day?"

"No, you have not, Paula."

"Well, never speak to me of it again. Neither you nor any one else can advise me. I am able to take care of myself. You should lie down and rest this afternoon, Olive; and if you wear any flowers this evening, wear white. I saw a bunch of pink roses in the dining-room that looked as if it were arranged for a corsage bouquet; it would not be nice with your gown. I hope everything will go off well; I have no doubt it will."

When Ferris had let himself in with his latch-key that night, he followed the sound of voices into the library. There Paula, in her white apron, with her dishevelled hair and brilliant color, playfully presented him to each one of her guests, as if they had never met before.

"These people see you so seldom that I am sure they have forgotten you," she said. "You will meet them all to-night, so it is well that you should know them, — all but Mr. Hagar; and oh! I forgot to say to you that Olive longed to ask you, only she was

afraid she did not know you well enough." This she said, bending over the tray, with merely a brief glance at the young painter to indicate that she was addressing him.

"Unfortunately, I am dining down town to-night," Ferris was saying at her elbow. Paula gave him a quick look of surprise, not unmixed with vexation. No one observed it, for the rest were talking among themselves; but Ferris winced a little, and there was real distress in his voice, as he said in a low tone: "I am so sorry, dear. If you had only reminded me of it this morning —"

"Do you hear what this gentleman says?" Paula cried, addressing the company. "I was right, you see; he has forgotten again, and this time a dinner engagement. To-morrow I am going to have Angela's blackboard taken into his room, and hung at the foot of his bed; and every engagement for a week to come shall be chalked upon it in big letters. There is your tea, Mr. Ferris, — not that you deserve it. But now, what will Olive say? It will never do to leave a vacant place at the table, and it is too late for her to find any one else to fill it. Mr. Hagar, will you give me your escort? Now wait a moment before you refuse. You know I have only just been telling you how anxious Mrs. Goring was to have you."

The others joined her in insisting that Hagar should take the vacant place; and Ferris, with the sweet, slow smile that lit up his dark face so finely, added his voice to the rest.

"You will really be doing me an immense favor,

Hagar, if you will be so good as to go with Mrs. Ferris. I've got a client here from Chicago, who was very hospitable to me when I was there a month ago, and I wanted to do what I could in the way of entertainment for him to-night, as he is off to-morrow. He would n't come home with me, because he had n't his dress-suit, so I have asked one or two other fellows to meet us at Parker's."

It would hardly have been courtesy in Hagar to decline, and he did not decline. He put on his evening dress with a strange mingling of elation and dissatisfaction. He was going with Paula in the place of her husband; and the fact that her husband himself had urged him to go forbade him to derive the slightest thrill of unlawful pleasure from the occasion.

Paula had on her formal air when she came downstairs, and found him waiting in the hall. She was sweet, but cool, like an iced peach. She allowed him to hand her into the carriage; but she spoke only once during their short drive, and that was to say it was growing cold. For Hagar, things had come to such a pass that it was happiness enough to be shut into the coupé with Paula by his side, and to feel her draperies brushing his elbow and knee.

The dinner went on deliberately, as such occasions do. Mr. Goring was present, and what was still stranger, in one of his affable moods; and Olive looked really happy. She was quite wonderful throughout the evening; she talked and laughed as if nothing unusual were going on, and did not betray

the least anxiety. Paula found an opportunity to whisper in her friend's ear that the whole affair had been a perfect success, before she took Hagar's arm to go to her carriage.

The house was dimly lighted when they drove up to it, the windows of Ferris's study at the top of the house being quite dark.

"Will you come in a little while?" Paula said to her companion. "I will play you the 'Mendelssohn Lied' you like so much."

He assented in the same neutral tone which she had employed in her invitation. "I don't believe I am in the mood for Mendelssohn to-night," he said, as she seated herself at the piano, after throwing off her cloak. He did not sit down, but moved restlessly about the room, as she turned over her music.

"What will you have, then? — Grieg, MacDowell, or Sullivan?"

"Play the 'Pizzicati.'"

"My fingers are too cold. Oh, here is 'Flirtation,' — you like that. Only it is really nothing without the orchestra."

She leaned back in the chair, with her arms outstretched, her wrists lifted slightly as the white fingers rose and fell, moving easily up and down the keyboard. Paula's technique was as nearly perfect as the best teachers could make it; and she played with emotional as well as artistic feeling. The light from the chandelier above her head — the only one burning in the room — fell upon her hair, her white arms, and the portion of her neck that

was visible where her gown was cut away a little at the back and front. The rest of her figure was shadowy, for her gown was of a dark, lustreless material, heavily trimmed with rich lace, of which a deep frill fell over her shoulders and bosom.

Hagar's artistic sense was profoundly stirred; but something else possessed him still more forcibly, — a strange intoxication which made him feel to a certain degree incapable of controlling his actions, and filled him with a vague apprehension. He did not mean to yield to the feeling; a careful training, an innate sense of honor, a deep regard for Paula as a woman, — all urged him to resist it. But he believed her unhappy, and the tender side of his nature yearned to comfort her. She looked so sweet, so childlike, so lovable, as she sat there, her pliant figure adapting itself with a slight suggestion of weariness to the lines of her chair. His imagination clothed her with a beautiful patience in bearing the loneliness of her life; and a mad desire to fall on one knee beside her, to slip an arm about that supple waist, to feel her head sink slowly to his shoulder, as the fingers still went softly over the keys, swept him from head to foot.

Is man, first of all, a physical being, that the moral part of him can be so completely routed out of sight? What is the meaning of this war that the soul must constantly wage against the body, and the body against the soul? Here is the God-given longing for love, — love in its fullest measure, perfect, satisfying, yes, and pure, like everything God-given;

and there, from that "glimmering summit far withdrawn," the pealing out of an eternal "No," like the bell on the reef that calls, "Death, death!" to every ship that comes near.

The battle-field is bloody, strewn with bones that are still moist, and with the dust of those long dried and crumbled, — a gory Waterloo, where so many souls have been worsted that one cannot but wonder there is so small a brotherhood of charity to bear away the dead and wounded. Oh, brothers, sisters! pity one another more, and scorn one another less. For one's self the scourge of condemnation, the robe of humiliation, the watch of long and terrible hours with conscience; but for a brother who has fallen, the strong uplifting arm and the tender voice of sympathy. Only God can know how many lions lie dead for the one that crouches over its victim.

Truth and honor fought in Hagar against the mad impulse which possessed him. The moisture stood on his forehead; there were deep purple dints in the palms of his hands, where the nails had almost cut the skin. The higher attributes still had such power that he believed them capable of victory. He would better have turned and fled; but the wisdom of retreat seldom appears to a man so strongly as to influence his action. Hagar would have despised himself if he had adopted so cowardly a means of self-preservation.

Besides, there was Paula, sweet, womanly, with her delicate profile turned toward him, unconscious of the emotional crisis through which he was pass-

ing. He began the usual sophistries. He asked himself why they should not be harmlessly happy together. It was no wrong to himself or to her that he should be her friend. He left Ferris out of the question, as a man who had ignored the gift of a lifetime; but Paula's honor as a wife was, he believed, sacred with him, — it must be.

Not for a moment had he ever sympathized with the sort of lawlessness that treats the bond of marriage lightly. Paula's theories had always shocked him, partly for the reason that a man is constitutionally unwilling to trust a woman with any sort of elastic tether, but still more because he had been taught by his own mother to reverence marriage as a sacred institution in some way closely identified with religion and the foundations of the universe.

When a man like this is first overcome, it is not because he is logically convinced of the supreme right of love. He may afterward compel his moral nature to adapt itself to the situation, and in the end blind and cripple it by subjection; but when he first yields, it is to a great rush of feeling that for the time being sweeps both conscience and reason out of sight. He has scorned the call for retreat, which is, in reality, his good angel bidding him "come away;" and so he fights, — first valiantly, it may be; then desperately, with the broken fragment of his sword; and then when that is gone, with bare hands; and then —

Paula was utterly unaware of the struggle that was going on in her very presence. Her own thoughts

were pleasant, idly and dreamily following the movement of the music. The intoxication that made Hagar's blood riot in his veins stirred hers only to a slight acceleration. She did not trouble herself to question why she was happier than usual. She only basked in his society, as unconsciously as a kitten at the warmth of a fire, not remembering that it was ever chilled. A woman, however recklessly she plays with a man's emotions, is seldom prepared for the outburst when it comes, for the reason that she has so little warning of its intensity in herself.

But Paula was not playing with Hagar, — at least, not intentionally. The relations that existed between them had begun so naturally and progressed so simply, that she had had little reason to question whether they held any other meaning than that which was on the surface. Her views of marriage and of the rest of life were all theoretical, and she held them lightly enough, except when something stirred her more deeply than usual. To herself she called her own marriage a mistake, though the burden of it did not always weigh heavily upon her. But there is always a grievance at hand, when one is in the mood to be a martyr, and in the hours of ennui inevitable to one who has exhausted nearly all the pleasures of life that are purchasable with money. In the fervors to which emotional music or literature can lift a romantic nature; in the times of discontent, which are the reaction from undue excitement, Paula called herself a neglected wife, and found in that fact the source of all she called her unhappiness.

The words Olive had spoken to her that morning had frightened her a little, though they had not opened her eyes to the truth. In spite of her bravado, she dreaded the criticism of the world, as any woman of refinement must. More than that, she respected her husband. He had never given her a sharp nor an unkind word. He had never criticised her; while she and Hagar could hardly be together five minutes without falling into an argument over something with regard to which they did not agree. And yet, when the thought of Hagar, the recollection of his smile, his voice, or some unconscious pose of his strong, graceful figure came suddenly to her, her heart would give a leap, and the warm blood would flow into her face. It had not been given to Roger ever to have moved her in that way.

She did not stop playing when she came to the end of the piece, but after a little modulation swung into a Chopin waltz, — number two, of opus 64. Her touch had the firmness and the delicacy which is the necessary combination for the interpretation of Chopin. The rich, mournful swell of the first movement gave way to the daring brilliancy of the second, and that to the impassioned tenderness of the *lento*. Paula's head drooped to one side and slightly forward; a faint, dreamy smile dawned upon her lips.

Her soul going out, as it seemed, on the breath of the melody, something suddenly caught her back to earth again. Did the keys give utterance to the sound that vibrated in her ear, — *Paula, darling?*

Her fingers trembled, she cast a quick glance over her shoulder; then the music stopped abruptly, and Paula sprang to her feet.

She stood for a moment, one hand on the instrument, her bosom heaving, her eyes wide open in surprise, staring at Hagar. Her face had grown deadly pale, but it was no whiter than his own.

He held out his hands; she could see that they shook. "Paula, you do love me, you must," he said desperately.

"How dare you?" she cried in a whisper. "No, do not come near me," she exclaimed aloud, as he advanced a step. "I forbid you to touch me. Leave the house, — leave it at once."

The real terror in her eyes would at any other moment have made an irresistible appeal to him, but now he paid no heed to it. "Paula, for God's sake, let me take you in my arms once, — just once; just for one moment, and then I will let you go, I promise you. Don't refuse me, darling; if you knew how I love you — "

He caught her in his arms, and drew her to him roughly, crushing her in his embrace. For a moment she struggled to escape; then she yielded helplessly, all the time uttering broken protests. "Oh, let me go, Mr. Hagar; let me go. What have I done that you should dare — my husband, Angela — oh — "

"Kiss me," he entreated. "Give me one kiss, Paula, only one."

"No, no. Oh, let me go! How dare you hold me so? Let me — "

For one instant his lips pressed hers, and then by her utmost effort she wrenched herself away from him. With her eyes upon him, as if he were a dangerous animal, she crept away round the piano, keeping her hands upon it as if she needed its support, and taking a few steps into the middle of the room, she suddenly uttered a low cry, and threw herself into a chair, letting her face fall on her outstretched arms.

She remained so quiet that Hagar feared she had fainted, and after a moment of anxious hesitation he moved toward her. But at his first step she raised her head in alarm. He halted instantly.

"Do not look at me in that way, Paula," he said in a husky voice. "I deserve it, but I cannot bear it. I will not come any nearer, I promise you; only do not make me feel like a criminal."

"What are you, then?" she demanded bitterly. Her voice was scarcely more than a whisper.

"I am what you have made me, — neither more nor less."

She shut her teeth over her under lip, letting her head rest heavily on her hand, and looking at the carpet. "Yes," she said slowly; "I am to blame. The woman is always the one to blame. There is something in me that made this possible, or it would not have happened."

"I will not have you say that, Paula," he interposed quickly. "I am not accusing you, — Heaven knows I am not so despicable as that. No man should dare to take your name so lightly; and it

belongs to a different order of men from mine to cast the blame of their own sins upon a woman. What I meant and all I meant was that what I am to you I am, and nothing more."

She opened her lips, but only a broken sigh escaped them; and she turned her face away, that he might not see how she was wrought upon.

Hagar was too agitated to remain still. He walked up and down the room with a nervous step, but softly, as if he were in the presence of death. He wondered, at the same time being only vaguely aware of what was going on in his own mind, why she did not bring her theories of personal liberty to bear upon the case; but he dared not question her, he was too deeply concerned as to his absolution. He came to a standstill a few steps away from where she sat, looking straight before her, her face turned away from the light.

"Paula," he said in a low voice of contrition.

She seemed to harden herself. She turned to him, letting her hands fall in her lap.

"Of course you will never come here again. I will have the portrait and the other things sent to you. It will not be easy to find excuses, but we can invent something. Now I wish you would leave me; I am rather tired."

"But before I go, will you not try to forgive me?"

She shook her head. "Never. You have no right to ask it."

"I do not ask it as a right, but for the sake of the happy hours we have spent together. I cannot go

unless you forgive me, Paula," he pleaded brokenly. "Say that you do, and I will leave you and go wherever you bid me. I was mad, brutal; but it was because —"

"Hush! Do not dare repeat those words. Oh, how lightly a man must think of a woman, when he can say such things to her! And yet you pretend — Mr. Hagar, will you please leave me at once?"

It was not a time for forgiveness, whatever change her mood might some time undergo. The sudden demand upon her emotions had left them exhausted, and she was at once weary and hardened. There would be no mercy shown him to-night, and he knew it.

"But the portrait, — no one else can do it," he said, hesitatingly, feeling it impossible to leave her in this way. "It is nearly done. I could finish it at the studio, but the likeness would not be so perfect. Two or three more sittings would be sufficient; and if it is to be Angela —"

She interrupted him by a burst of hysterical weeping. "Go, oh, please go away!" she sobbed. "I cannot bear any more." She flung herself upon the couch, and buried her face in the cushions, her shoulders heaving convulsively, her whole frame shaken.

"Paula —" began Hagar; but she did not heed him. He stood a few moments looking down upon her, then turned and walked irresolutely away. When he had gone a few steps, he stopped and looked back. She still paid no attention to him;

she had apparently forgotten his presence. He crept to the front door, softly opened it, and went out, the sound of her sobs throbbing in his ears.

Paula did not hear him depart, nor did she hear her husband enter twenty minutes later. Seeing that the parlor was lighted, Ferris, when he had laid aside his overcoat, pushed back the half-drawn portière, and glanced into the room. He saw his wife lying on the couch, with her face covered, a long, convulsive breath shaking her body from time to time.

He stood for a moment in mute surprise. Then he said, in a voice full of concern, "What is it, Paula?" He had seldom seen her cry.

She started up, looked at him wildly, and springing to her feet, rushed past him out of the room. He heard her hurrying upstairs, stumbling once or twice over the skirt of her gown. Then a door shut, and the house was still.

On the way to his study Ferris paused to look into Angela's room. The child lay with upturned face, one arm over her head, and the other flung abroad. One little knee, raised, made a tiny tent of the bedclothes. He put back the hair from her forehead, and, stooping, pressed a kiss upon it. Angela stirred and turned herself upon her side, throwing out both arms with a child's free movement, and giving a deep sigh of comfort.

He moved carefully away, not to disturb her. His wife's room adjoined the child's; but the door was closed between them, and no sound was heard within.

He softly mounted the stairs to his study, and shut himself inside.

He had long been convinced that Paula's happiness was not dependent upon his society. In fact, he had been assured, when he married her, that she did not love him in the way a man desires to be loved by his wife; but he knew, also, that the enthusiasm of a youthful passion does not always furnish the surest foundation for permanent happiness, and he had believed that something finer and more lasting than the average marital attachment would grow out of their relation.

It might have been so with a man less sensitive and reserved and a woman less impetuous and highly strung. But in the fear of making himself repugnant, he had erred in the other direction. He had failed in those small attentions that most easily win the woman's heart, even when they are not backed up by such sterling qualities as Ferris possessed; and Paula, with no less of the vanity and egotism that commonly belong to her sex and age, had first imagined herself slighted, then injured, then unloved.

The story is as old as humanity, and has furnished the novelists with a fruitful theme. The divorce courts do not show up these cases; but go into the family nearest you, and if you catch any glimpse of the current that flows just below the surface, you will be sure to find something of misunderstanding and the misinterpretation of motives. The rift, the speck, the gradually widening stream, are ever coming between us and our happiness. Decay works

no less steadily, and far more insidiously, in the relations of life than in the garnered fruit.

Ferris said to himself, pacing the room with bent head and hands thrust deep into his pockets, that for him marriage had been a miserable failure, but that was not the greatest of the wrong. It had blighted Paula's life, which should have been bright and sunny. He was not a man to make a woman love him, — that he had proved past doubting. It was no fault either of intention or of effort; it was simply that through the lack of certain essential qualities he had been doomed to fail.

He came back to the old conclusion. The only remedy that lay within his power was to inflict his society upon her as little as was possible, without making the situation evident to their friends, — the mere thought of arousing comment or criticism was intolerable to him. It would not be difficult to manage, for his business could easily be allowed to occupy all his time between waking and sleeping, and during the hours when he must be under his own roof, — well, the house was large, and he was already in the habit of passing most of his evenings in his study.

As he sat down in the light of his shaded lamp, and drew some papers from a pigeon-hole, the lines in his face seemed to have deepened. The fine curves of the mouth and chin had become harder, and dark shadows had gathered about the eyes. He looked over his papers mechanically, — they were as meaningless to him as they would have been to an Italian fruit-vender.

At last he dropped them, pushing them away with a hopeless gesture, and, running his fingers through his hair, let his forehead sink into the palm of his hand. "My God!" he groaned, "why should I live?"

Paula, having undressed, opened the door between her own room and Angela's. She listened to hear if the child's breathing was regular; but she did not go in to look at her, as was her custom, often half rousing the little sleeper to ask her if she loved mamma. She said to herself bitterly that she was not fit to kiss her own child with that other kiss still burning upon her lips; and she threw herself on her bed, and lay with wide-open eyes, staring at the grotesquely shaped patch of light that the street lamp cast upon the ceiling.

CHAPTER VI

A PARTIAL SURRENDER

SHE woke early next morning, — before the servants were stirring, indeed. She tried to sleep again, but found it impossible to do so. Strains of the Chopin waltz persisted in running over and over in her brain, — the wheels of the wagons outside revolved in measure with the music; and the scene of the night before was painted in piercing colors on her closed eyelids.

At length, when she could bear it no longer, she sprang from bed and began to dress. Her hair, which she had neglected to brush the night before, was matted and tangled. It took her some time to straighten and smooth it. By the time she had finished her toilet, the maids were about the house. Restless as she was, she was yet able to pay attention to the small usages of her life. She could not excite the curiosity of the servants by appearing at this unwonted hour; so she forced herself to remain in her room until her usual time for going downstairs.

When it was eight o'clock, — the hour at which she often breakfasted, for she was never a late sleeper, — she left her room and went straight to the nursery. The room had been put in order for the day, and a cheerful coal-fire was burning in the grate. Paula went to the closet where the picture

was put away and brought it out, carefully keeping the back of the canvas toward her, and leaned it against the wall. Then she walked away with her heart beating rather quickly, stood irresolute for a moment, and suddenly turned about and faced the portrait.

A great wave of feeling swept over her, causing her to catch her breath and bring her hands quickly together, palm to palm. It was as if Angela's self stood alive and breathing before her. The child was standing in one of her airy poses, with an effect of bending slightly forward as if she might step from the canvas in another moment. The eyes looked straight at her mother, grave, yet with a suggestion of the child's innocent mockery when it says, "I know something which you do not;" there was a faint smile like that of the Sphinx upon her lips. A sudden thought thrilled the mother's heart, — did Angela see something invisible to herself? She cast a rapid glance over her shoulder in the reality of the misgiving. But the picture was like Angela, — it *was* Angela. And it was Hagar's work, — without him it could never have been.

This variable woman experienced another revulsion of feeling. She had been angry with Hagar the night before. Though the touch of his hand or a tender look might have thrilled her, she was too sensitive and refined not to have been shocked and repelled by his passionate demonstrations. But now, looking at his work, resentment gave place to a dangerous pity. She remembered how white and

sorry he had looked, and her heart warmed to him. Surely for one offence she need not punish him forever. She had his promise that the transgression should not be repeated, and she trusted him; the thought of his honor gave her a thrill of pride in him.

She turned with one of her sudden impulses and ran into Angela's room. Her abrupt entrance woke the child, who fretted a little with her face in the pillow before she suffered her mother to lift her out of bed into her arms.

"What made you waken me up?" she demanded, looking at her mother with blinking eyes. "When Nora wakens me up, you scold her. I was dreaming a nice dream."

"It is time you were wakened up," said Paula. "Mamma wanted to see you, darling. She wanted to kiss you on your sweet little neck, right there." She buried her face in the child's neck, and Angela laughed outright.

"Oh, mamma, you tickle me!" she cried, shuddering with delight. "Yes, do it once more;" and again she went off into a peal of childish laughter. "Now let me do it to you." Thus they frolicked for a few moments like two children together; then Paula said, —

"Now I am going to dress you, dear. I have something to show you, — a picture. You shall see if you can tell who it is. Put your little arm into the sleeve, darling. What was the nice dream you were having?"

"Oh, it was about a tall man with gray hair and bright eyes! His eyes just smiled, mamma, same as grandpa's do in the picture. He came and stood; that 's all he did, — just stood and looked at me. I think he was going to say something nice, only you came and stopped it. I wish you had n't come, mamma. I wanted to see him some more."

"It was only a dream," Paula said, more decidedly than she usually spoke to the child. She thought of the look Angela's eyes had in the picture, and of what Hagar had said. But the sun was shining in at the windows; and the small, round face looked into hers, warm and rosy with sleep. Paula peremptorily dismissed her vague misgivings.

"Dreams are not real, you know," she said, buttoning the little frock. "They are just make-believe, like the stories we think up and tell each other. Mamma has all sorts of funny dreams."

"Do you? But this was n't funny; it was nice. I wish I had that man for my grandpa."

"There, do not talk about him any more," said the mother, so decidedly that Angela's lip began to quiver. Then she caught the child in her arms, and half smothered her with kisses.

As they went into the hall, Ferris came out of his room. He looked pale and weary, and he did not smile as he bade them good-morning. But Paula turned toward the nursery, saying as unconcernedly as if the episode of the night before had been blotted out of her recollection, —

"We are going to look at something, Angela and I. Will you come with us? This way. There! what do you think of it?"

"Why, that is me!" said Angela, the first to break the silence, as all three stood before the portrait. "What a funny man he was to say he could n't paint my eyes, was n't he, mamma? I shall laugh at him when he comes again. Is he coming to-day, mamma?"

"No, dear." Paula stole a hurried glance at her husband. "Do you like it, Roger?"

"It is perfect," Ferris said in a low tone.

"And of course — don't you think — don't you think it had better be finished?"

"Why, of course. Finished, — certainly. Why not?"

"It was merely an experiment," Paula explained. "He felt that he could not do her justice; at least, he was afraid of that. But he has succeeded; as you say, it is perfect, or will be when he has finished the background. It ought to be done immediately, before anything — that is, before we go away. And what kind of a frame should you suggest, — ivory or gold?" In this way she ran on all through breakfast.

During the afternoon Grace Maury came in.

"I have been trying to get round to see you ever since the theatre-party," she said, flashing into the parlor where Paula sat at the piano playing over the Chopin waltz. "Of course you are dying to know all about it, and I will allow myself just fif-

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teen minutes to tell you. The play was superb, — that goes without saying; you have seen Mr. Stonehenge, and you know what his acting is. I went with the Burnses, — I tell you that just to set your dear proper little heart at rest. You think me an awful reckless creature; but in reality, Mrs. Ferris, I 'm a terrible stickler for propriety, — everybody thinks so but yourself. You ought to hear Mr. Devolle; he is always calling me Priscilla, — in fact, he hardly ever calls me anything else. Well, Stonehenge, as I said, was perfectly divine. He gave us the loveliest smiles whenever he had an opportunity, — I say *us* because Mrs. Burns appropriated most of them to herself, — so absurd. But of course the supper was the event of the evening. It was served in Mr. Stonehenge's rooms, and two or three of the company were there, — Miss Belterton, the leading lady (dreadfully plain, in my opinion), and Mr. Casterbridge, the funny man, whose real name is Daniel Stall, — comical, is n't it ? I know, because I used to go to school with him. He was a very nice boy, always carrying my books home for me and bringing me candy, you know. Miss Belterton looks very well at a distance; but when one gets close, — dear me, the paint and the wrinkles! She must be thirty-five at the very least. Mr. Stonehenge says she is very good support; and of course a star does not wish to have any one in his company who will divide the honors with him. Mrs. Burns sat at Stonehenge's right, — the precedence of age, you know. I was on his left, and he gave me a good

deal more of his attention; you may be sure she did not half like it. But, oh! Mrs. Ferris, you should see me in the new waist. It is a little lower than I meant to have it, though nothing like *décolleté*, — only half low, you know. Still, that is really the most trying of anything, you must admit that; and every one said it was very becoming. Each of the ladies had a corsage bouquet beside her plate. Mine was dark red carnations. Mr. Stonehenge said they were exactly suited to my style; and really I think they are, don't you, Mrs. Ferris?"

"Here is Mr. Dimmont," said Paula, who had gone over to the window.

With his flaxen hair, his round, rosy face, his tight red-brown gloves, and his stout, trim figure, Dimmont resembled a boy doll in a toy-shop window; and the effect of mechanism was still further carried out by the stiffness with which he carried his arms and head. He bowed low to Miss Maury when Paula introduced them; and while he was deliberately returning to the perpendicular, Paula heard a furtive snap of the elastic band that bound the young reporter's note-book. The closing pages of that interesting volume were devoted to memoranda for the forthcoming Great American Novel, of which Miss Maury was to be the author. At present she was collecting her types; and as she had said to Paula, she knew her own at once whenever they crossed her path.

As an automatic conversationalist, however, Dimmont was a great improvement upon any mechanical

contrivance that man has yet been able to produce. Like the talking doll, he was not always intelligible; but there were no sudden and mysterious silences to indicate the disarrangement of internal machinery. A smile either at the right or the wrong time was all the encouragement he required; and Paula, having long since learned this, never gave herself any pains to entertain him.

He was a frequent caller, and always brought some fresh bit of gossip, — what new gowns Mrs. Clymhye was having made in Paris, and what style of hat was being worn in New York; the latest scandalous flirtation in London society, or the private announcement of some engagement in high life, gleaned somehow from headquarters, and as yet unknown to the world. How Dimmont collected these facts was a mystery, for no one had ever known him to ask a question and wait for the answer. Paula herself never told him anything; yet she had a terrible feeling that he knew every detail of her life, and would not fail to retail it in the houses where he was a welcomed guest for the sake of his social bulletins, which were almost as interesting as a weekly journal.

With any other visitor she would have been annoyed by the soft, incessant scratching of Grace's pencil over the paper as the girl sat half buried in a big easy-chair, with the toe of one small boot just touching the floor; but though everybody liked Dimmont and realized his usefulness as a member of society, everybody enjoyed turning a joke upon

him. In the midst of his conversation Paula began to laugh, and Dimmont looked up inquiringly.

"I am afraid you are not aware what purpose you are serving," she said, with a glance at Grace. "I really feel that I ought to tell you 'there 's a chiel amang ye takin' notes.'"

"Oh!" said Dimmont, arching his brows and following Paula's eye with a slow, bewildered glance. He got up and looked over the arm of Grace's chair, where the girl, unabashed by discovery, was deliberately finishing a sentence in shorthand.

"Do you mean to say, Miss — er — Maury, that you are — er — taking me down?"

"Oh, I don't think any one could do that, could they?" retorted the girl, looking up at him.

"Huh, well!" replied Dimmont, with one of his whistling laughs.

Miss Maury sat upright, slipping her note-book into her pocket and drawing her boa up about her neck.

"Well, I suppose you won't talk any more now. It was unkind of Mrs. Ferris to give me away. I *must* be going anyhow. I don't know that you realize it, but that was quite a *mot* of yours about the young man who could afford to send his lady Mermets at eight dollars a dozen because he never paid his bills. And I 'm very glad you said what you did of Ibsen, — that he made you feel as if a spider had crawled down your back and died halfway down. Excuse me, but was it original with you? You don't mind my using it, I hope, — in

my novel, you know. Perhaps Mrs. Ferris has told you I 'm writing one. Well, good-by, Mr. Dimmont. I 'm awfully glad you happened to come in."

In the hall Paula asked her friend to come again on Tuesday, when Mr. Hagar would be there to work on the portrait. Since Roger wished the picture finished, it would be necessary that Hagar should come two or three times more; but Paula was determined not to allow herself to be alone with him again. Angela's presence would be a sufficient safeguard against any repetition of his folly, even if she could not trust his promise; but the silence would be awkward, and Paula hated any sort of awkwardness. Certainly there would be no oppressive gaps in the conversation when Grace was present.

Miss Maury expressed herself delighted with the prospect of meeting Hagar, whom she had never yet had an opportunity of interviewing. After making the acquaintance of an artist, if an enterprising young woman could not obtain an invitation to visit his studio, she could hardly consider herself worthy of a position on the "Babbler." She promised to appear promptly at ten o'clock on Tuesday morning, and would probably accept Mrs. Ferris's invitation to lunch.

"And please, Grace, do not bring your note-book," said Paula, so decidedly that the girl replied in a rather hurt tone, —

"Oh, of course not, if you say so."

It was a somewhat delicate task to word the note

to Hagar; but Paula had decided to ignore entirely the incident of Thursday evening. She possessed the sort of adaptability which she sometimes suspected of being dishonesty; for Paula was a relentless searcher of her own motives. It is a question if one is not, generally speaking, better off without the habit of self-analysis, since it is difficult to be perfectly sincere even with one's own soul. But the practice is not an easy one to restrain, being in reality one form of the desire *to know* which has given us the nebular hypothesis, the theory of gravitation, and the story of the Aryans, and which, had it not been one of the most powerful impulses of the human mind, could never have wrought such splendid results in the face of difficulties so formidable.

Paula wrote in this way:—

DEAR MR. HAGAR,—I hope you have no objection to Miss Maury's presence at Angela's next sitting, as she will be spending the day with me, and will probably like to see you at work. Mr. Ferris is quite desirous that the portrait should be completed as soon as possible, and I trust nothing will prevent your coming on Tuesday, as usual.

PAULA FERRIS.

When the young painter arrived, he found Angela and her mother in the nursery playing at ninepins, Miss Maury not having yet appeared. Mrs. Ferris rose from the floor, and gave him her hand as unconcernedly as if nothing had happened. "Good heavens, these women!" thought Hagar, who was himself trembling from head to foot.

The picture was already on the easel. "I had Nora take out the canvas," Paula explained, with an air of indifference. "I thought it would save time. Mr. Ferris has seen it; we think it is very good."

"I am glad if it pleases you." Hagar was taking out his colors and brushes with business-like haste. If Mrs. Ferris desired to economize time, he would do what he could to further her wish. A man can be piqued and angry as well as a woman, and his self-esteem is by no means his least vulnerable point. In fact, a truthful history of the world would show that more than one man has cherished through life a spiteful hatred of the woman he once loved, for the simple reason that she did not appreciate his manly qualities to the extent of marrying him.

"It is a pity Miss Maury has not come," said Paula. "I hope nothing has happened to detain her. She is a very busy person."

"I trust you will not be disappointed," returned Hagar, briefly.

He had been at work nearly half an hour when the bell gave an imperative ring, and the next moment Miss Maury came into the room with her customary swiftness of motion, bringing with her several cubic feet of frosty outdoor air.

"How delightfully warm you are in here! B-r-r! It 's freezing cold outside, do you know. If I were not a newspaper reporter, or if you had n't invited me to lunch, Mrs. Ferris, I think I should be at home in an easy-chair with my feet on the register,

reading one of Daudet's novels. Oh, how do you do, Angela?"

This tardy recognition of the child's presence touched, as it always did, Paula's sensitive motherhood.

"Miss Maury, Mr. Hagar," she said rather coldly.

Miss Maury turned and nodded graciously over her shoulder, loosening her boa as she did so. She wore a becoming jacket of dark red; and her round, bright black eyes shone like those of a rodent animal over the bristling fur that quite concealed the lower part of her face.

"You have heard me speak of Miss Maury," Paula continued, not to be too ungracious. "She is on the 'Babbler' staff."

"Indeed!" said Hagar. His smile was not wholly spontaneous; but it relieved the sombre, almost sullen expression of his face.

"Oh, yes; I 'm a newspaper reporter. I write under the name of 'Hesperus,' — probably you 've seen my things. I tried to keep it a secret; but it got out somehow, — everybody knows it now. I thought of taking a new *nom de plume;* but Mr. Devolle, one of the editors of the 'Babbler,' you know, said that every one had got on to my style, — that 's his own expression, — and it would make no difference what name I put to my work. I even sign my initials sometimes." She appeared to be directing her remarks at Hagar, looking straight at him with her shining eyes while she pulled off her gloves; and he said "Yes?" with another smile.

She ran across the room, and threw her hat and jacket, her boa, muff, and gloves upon a table; coming back, she stopped uninvited and took a careless survey of the picture, pulling out the fluff of hair on her forehead, and squeezing in her trim waist as she stood at Hagar's elbow. Paula watched her, growing somewhat impatient as she offered no comment upon the likeness.

"I don't see how you know what you are doing," the girl said at last, with one of her gurgling laughs. "When I am so near an oil painting, it always looks like nothing but a conglomeration of colors. If I were going to paint a picture, I should probably make just one stroke at a time, and then walk across the room to see how it looked."

Hagar laughed good-humoredly at this, and Paula felt a distinct sensation of displeasure. She thought Grace might have had something to say of the picture itself; but she would not ask for her opinion, — in fact, she did not really care for it.

To her surprise, Miss Maury brought a hassock, and sat down not three feet away from Hagar's chair.

"I hope you don't mind my looking on," she said when she had seated herself, "because I always like to see how things are made. I have what is called an inquiring mind. If I had not, of course I could n't be a reporter." She laughed again.

"You are fond — of your work?" Hagar asked between the strokes of his brush.

"Oh, fond of it! Don't you think I must be? I

go through snow and slush and rain and heat and dust, and over icy pavements and over baking bricks, from morning till night almost every day, and then sit up till twelve and one and sometimes two o'clock writing up articles. I 've been snubbed so outrageously that it would seem as if no human being could bear it (lots of people think a newspaper reporter is n't a human being); and then again I have been received with open arms. Most persons find it worth while to treat us civilly, — we 're a sensitive lot, you know," with another bubbling laugh. "What I 'm working for is to make myself necessary to the paper, — that 's what a newspaper writer has got to do. Plenty of people can write, — if you could see the cartloads that come in! But my aim is to make myself indispensable, don't you see? — to do work that nobody else can do. A dust-heap is fruitful material for me to make a feature out of. I have a sense of humor, too, and that 's a great help. I think everybody ought to be funny who can be, don't you? People are taking life so seriously nowadays. And I always get more than anybody else out of an interview. People tell me everything, as a rule, — *interviewees* I call them. Mr. Devolle thought that was great, — my coining that word. He made me promise to make a note of it and work it in sometime where it would tell. One thing that has been very much in my favor is my size; everybody seems to think I 'm clever for my years. They never take me to be more than eighteen, and I 'm almost twenty-two. I 'm doing well, fortunately for

my family. I 've got a mother and two sisters up in the country, and a brother down here that I 'm putting through Tech. I work with him some every day, — I 'm bound he shall get through. I have some other relations in Boston too; but we don't meet. I might as well belong to a circus troupe as be on a newspaper staff, in their opinion. When they give a big party, they remember my existence. They send for me to come to lunch, and pretend they 've been trying to get over to see me for the longest while. I can see right through it, of course; and they don't get much of a notice if I can help it. There are just two things I hate, — night work and electric cars. I expect to be run down by one of those horrid things some day. Mr. Devolle has been very good to me; he has n't given me much night work."

"You ought to succeed, with so much enthusiasm," Hagar said. He was not working very steadily; he paused every now and then to glance aside at the girl's *riant*, sparkling face.

"Oh, I *have* succeeded, — so far as I have gone, at any rate. You don't suppose I mean to be a reporter forever? I intend to write a novel. I have about all the material I want now; I expect to begin on the book very soon. Part of the scene is laid in India. I 've never been there, you know; but I have picked up considerable information about the country, — I 've read everything Kipling ever wrote, for one thing. That makes me think, I wrote an article on Japan once and the 'Babbler' printed it.

I got all my matter from hearing a man who had just come from there talk to Mr. Devolle. I was running the typewriter at the time, but I did n't lose a word. One of our subscribers wrote to the editor-in-chief that the letter was very interesting, and must have been written by a person who had travelled extensively and observed a great deal. We had a great laugh over it in the office. That is what makes me useful to the paper, you know, — that sort of general facility."

"Mr. Hagar," said Paula, immediately, as if she had been waiting for an opportunity to speak, "is the light arranged to your liking?"

"Thank you; I think so."

"Because the day is so dark I thought you might like the shades raised a little more. I should not like to lose the effect of sunlight in the picture."

Hagar turned toward the window, letting the gray light fall on his handsome face. There were blue shadows under his eyes, Paula could see from where she sat; they were there for her. Her expression softened as she looked at him.

"Perhaps the middle shade would bear raising a little," he said, preparing to lay down his brush.

"Let me do it," cried Miss Maury, starting up. She jumped into a chair; for the window, one of a group of three, was tall and narrow. "Tell me when to stop," she said, looking over her shoulder at Hagar as she slowly pushed up the shade with one hand.

She was standing too near the edge of the chair,

which began to tilt forward. The girl gave a little exclamation of dismay, and Hagar sprang to his feet, overturning the easel, scattering his tubes to right and left, and dropping his palette face downward upon the carpet. As the young girl fell, he caught her in his arms. Her eyes were closed; and as she did not at once open them, he carried her over to the couch, where he laid her down.

Paula had put Angela from her lap, and come forward deliberately to where the picture lay upon the floor. She did not even glance at the small figure on the couch; she was very pale. She stooped and raised the frame in her hands, turning her back upon the others, and examined the canvas carefully to see if there were any break in it. When she had satisfied herself that it had sustained no injury, she leaned it against the wall while she righted the easel, upon which she placed the frame. Then she stooped and began gathering up the smaller articles.

"I will do that," said Hagar, coming forward. "Had you not better attend to your friend? She has fainted."

At this Paula rose, looking him in the face. They were very near each other, and Hagar's expression changed quickly; his eyes, from being cold and stern, grew suddenly warm and beseeching. Nothing was said; but the color rushed back to Paula's cheeks. She went swiftly over to the couch where Grace lay.

"Oh, I have not fainted," Miss Maury said, beginning to laugh; "I am not a fainting girl." She

cast a glance at Hagar, who with his back turned was gazing with dismay at the stains his palette had left upon the carpet.

"Let me get you a little wine," said Paula.

She went out of the room, and returned with a tray and glasses. "Nora is coming with some biscuits, and we will have no more work to-day. I think we were all a little startled just now, and our nerves will not get righted at once. We shall be better for a little refreshment. Mine was a double scare, — for Grace and for the picture. Do you know, dear, I ran for the picture first? I saw you had not hurt yourself, and I was so afraid the canvas had been torn."

She laughed merrily. The animation had come back into her face. She spread the small table and did the honors of the impromptu lunch gayly, almost hilariously. "When you have been frightened nearly to death, it is delightful just to find yourself alive," she said.

Grace made the most of her accident, complaining of a pain in her side, and letting herself be propped up by some pillows tucked in behind her back. Paula was not disturbed by this, even when Hagar himself got up to perform the service. He had said very gently, "Do you wish me to pour the wine for you, Mrs. Ferris?" and it was very sweet to know that they were friends again. Angela sat on Hagar's knee, with his arm about her, nibbling biscuit after biscuit with her small teeth.

When Hagar had left the house, Miss Maury turned to Paula with an eloquent glance.

"Were you pleased with him, Grace?" inquired Paula, indifferently.

"Well, rather! I think he is the handsomest man I ever saw," replied the girl, with decision.

"What! handsomer than Mr. Stonehenge?"

"I do not call Mr. Stonehenge handsome. He is interesting, — rather so, but not at all handsome. And, Mrs. Ferris, I will tell you, — I would not tell another soul on earth, — those beautiful teeth of his — "

"Well?"

"They are *false.*"

"Indeed!" said Paula, laughing. "Well, that is not so bad as a wig."

"Upper — and — under," Miss Maury asserted, enunciating the words quite distinctly.

"Have you known it long?"

"Mrs. Ferris! Do you think I could rave over a man if I knew he had artificial teeth? No; I have not known it long. Dan Stall told me, — that is Casterbridge of his company, you know. I would not believe it at first. I have always prided myself upon never being deceived in such matters; but he swore by the Great Boot, — that was always his favorite oath, even when we used to go to school together years ago, — that he had seen Stonehenge with *them,* you know — out!"

"Oh, heavens!"

"Don't speak to me, Mrs. Ferris," said the young

girl, sinking back in her chair. "I was overwhelmed, that is all I can say, — simply overwhelmed."

"He has finished his engagement, has he not?"

"Yes; and started on the New England circuit. He might have gone to Mars, for all I care."

"How are the mighty fallen!" said Paula, with a laugh.

"You may say so, indeed. But is n't Mr. Hagar handsome? Nothing false there, at all events. I do admire a blond man. I suppose one reason is that I am dark myself. I shall accept his invitation to visit his studio very soon."

"Shall you?" asked Paula, raising her eyebrows.

"Yes. I have always been crazy over studios. They are such jumbled-up places, you never know what you will find. You go about turning the canvases and stumbling upon all sorts of interesting things."

"Do you?"

"Studies, you know, most of them. I am particularly interested in studies. They are not done for the public eye; and there is a sort of sincerity in them one does not always find at the exhibitions. It is like a voyage of discovery to go prowling about among the dust and dirt, the brass kettles and Japanese jars and old armor. Only one needs to wear a gown that won't spoil; don't you think so?"

"I am afraid I am not able to say. It has never occurred to me to make that kind of excursion. I think I should have to feel sure that it would be agreeable to my host."

"Oh, they don't care; they are used to it. Artists have no sense of order; they think that beauty is heaven's first law. An earthquake might upset a painter's studio while he was out, and he would never know it. I have always been interested in Mr. Hagar's work, — what I have seen of it at the exhibitions. I have been wishing for an opportunity to visit his studio. Mr. Devolle would have sent me any time, of course; but it is an advantage to have a special invitation. Now I can write him up or not, as I please." She remained silent for a moment, then she gave a soft laugh of consciousness. "Did you notice how quickly he sprang up when I fell? He was awfully nice about it."

"He is always very considerate," said Mrs. Ferris. She had a feeling as if she had suddenly lost faith in the whole world.

"Gallant would be a better word. But tell me, Mrs. Ferris, what is your honest opinion of Angela's portrait? Don't you think he has idealized a little?"

"Not in the least," said Paula, emphatically. "He has simply made a perfect likeness; that was what we wished. It is hardly necessary to idealize a child, and especially a child like Angela. On the contrary, he was very much afraid he could not do her justice."

"Yes, I dare say," Miss Maury replied indifferently. "Well, of course, the accessories of a portrait are always more or less flattering; they are studied for that purpose. What days do you say he comes, — Tuesdays and Fridays? I should like

to drop in again soon. It is rather interesting to see him work."

"Oh, if you like, of course."

"Luncheon is served," said a maid in the doorway.

Before Hagar's next visit, however, Paula sent Miss Maury a note: —

"On considering the matter, I think it will be better if you are not here on Friday. I find that Mr. Hagar works much more satisfactorily when he is undisturbed, and it is quite desirable that the picture should be completed as soon as possible. I shall be glad to take you to his studio if you will let me know what day you would like to go."

When Hagar came again, he found Mrs. Ferris still cool and distant. She looked sad and weary. Her face was one of the sort upon which melancholy sits becomingly; her eyelids were heavy, and the corners of her mouth drooped like a child's. She was rather pale, though with a clear, warm pallor.

She was, in fact, as miserable as a woman can be who has every material comfort and luxury a woman can possess. Ferris had gone out of town for two or three days; he had sent a messenger for the things he wished to take, and in a hurried note had bidden Paula enjoy herself while he should be away. The note was kind, but not exactly affectionate; to Paula's active imagination it sounded forced. She did not love him, — how can a woman love a man who finds no pleasure in her society and persistently avoids her? — but even when a husband and wife no longer love each other, they may at least be friends.

It does not take much to make a woman think herself injured; and Paula could call to mind several occasions when Ferris had carried himself with coldness and reserve, instead of manifesting the warmer feelings naturally to be expected in a husband; and indeed she was able to gather as much material for the maintenance of her own theory of injury as Ferris found to support his. It was one of those misunderstandings which seem to have been deliberately arranged and imposed upon two helpless victims by an inexorable fate.

Hagar painted very steadily that morning, even under the shadow of Paula's evident unhappiness. The forenoon slipped away, and he still worked on, deeply interested in what he was doing. The morning had been dull; but all at once the clouds parted and the sun broke out, flooding the nursery with warmth and brightness. The darkest mood must be more or less affected by sunshine, and Paula's spirits were always sensitive to external influences. At a quaint remark of Angela's she suddenly laughed outright.

Hagar looked up smiling. He seemed a part of the sunshine, with his golden hair and his eyes like a bit of the summer sky, and his winning, luminous smile.

"What do you think I shall do, Angela, when I have got your picture all done? I cannot come here any more, and I am afraid I shall not see you at all. Shall you miss me?"

"Yes," answered the child, leaning back against

her mother in one of her accessions of shyness. "Sha'n't we, mamma?"

"Oh, I am not going to feed Mr. Hagar's vanity in that way," said Paula, archly. "He has too great an idea of his importance already to need any encouragement from me."

"What cruel injustice!" he murmured.

"'I must be cruel only to be kind.'"

"But that is cruel kindness. You might at least — let me think that I shall be — missed a little," he said, painting as he talked. "I will promise not to be inflated with conceit; and one — who has so much admiration and adulation might easily — spare a little to a less fortunate being."

"How absurd!" said Paula, laughing in spite of herself. "Perhaps I am not flattered and admired so much as you think."

"I did not say anything about flattery. That would be — impossible."

"I do not like you when you say such things," said Paula, gravely.

"Why not?"

"Well, because those speeches are never sincere."

"But why should they not be sincere? That is one of the faults of our society. It is made up in such a way that one cannot — speak an agreeable truth without being accused of flattering. It is only the unpleasant speeches one may take stock in. Why should I not be able to ask you if you will miss me when you do not — see me any more, and why should you not be able to say yes, as frankly?

That is, if it would really be true, and you will miss me — just a little."

Paula ignored the implied question. "You are right. It would be better if we spoke more plainly and more simply."

"Then why should you not tell me whether you will miss me or not?" he persisted.

"Because all things are not expedient."

This was verging on dangerous ground, and Paula's color suddenly deepened.

"That may be true," said Hagar, with a sigh. "But must we always live for expediency?"

"I suppose so."

"But it is inevitable that we should get to hate it?"

She did not answer; and just then Nora knocked at the door with Angela's hat and cloak.

"Oh, is it so late?" cried Paula, starting. "I don't know whether I will have Angela go out or not." She went to the window and looked out.

"It 's cleared off beautiful, 'm," suggested the nursemaid.

"Yes, I know," Paula said, looking doubtfully at the child.

"Oh, mamma, I want to go. We had a lovely time yesterday. Nora was my horse, and we played drive out to the Reservower, and Helen drove Marie; and oh, we had just a lovely time! Of course I 'm going. Come, Nora, put on my things."

"Very well," said the mother. She buttoned the little girl's cloak herself, and put on her mittens.

A heavy silence fell when the two were left alone,

— one of those silences in which one could easily be led to believe that the pressure of the atmosphere upon one's person is equal to forty or more pounds to the square inch.

"How did you like Miss Maury?" asked Paula, when she felt that she could bear the humming in her ears no longer.

Hagar's eyebrows went up a little before he answered. He made a few more strokes with his brush before he laid it down and took up a fresh tube of color to squeeze on his palette.

"Well, she is not just like any of her guild I have happened to meet before."

"That is not answering my question," Paula said, with a vain attempt at speaking carelessly.

"Oh, I liked her very much, of course. She is a bright little girl."

"Yes, she is. She almost supports her mother and sisters, and she is helping her brother to his education. She is very clever, I think. They would not keep her on the 'Babbler' if she were not."

"No; there is not much sentiment in that business, I fancy."

"Have you met many of that profession? — you say she is different from the others."

"Oh, they have been coming to the studio more or less. I know two or three of them quite well. Most of them are very quiet and business-like and dignified. Your friend is one of the most talkative young ladies I ever saw."

"I suppose I have spoiled her. I have let her

talk about herself because it pleases her; and I always like to please people when I can. She is never dull, at any rate."

"No; one would not be apt to fall asleep in her company."

"Do you think her pretty?"

"Not exactly. She is piquant, rather, — well, to tell the truth, I did not take much notice of her. I was thinking of something else."

Paula did not answer. She was standing by the large table, piling up some books of Angela's. Hagar came over and stood beside her. He waited a moment for her to finish what she was doing; then, as she still fingered the books nervously, he gently pushed them aside and took her hands in his.

"Have you forgiven me?" he said, bending his fair head to look into her averted face, that drooped forward like a broken flower. "I am truly penitent, Paula; I will never repeat the offence. Only forgive me."

"Please let me go," she whispered, her head drooping still lower.

He hesitated a moment, and then released her hands.

"You see I am willing to obey you in all things. Will you not say the one word that would make me happy?"

"You were inexcusable."

"I know I was."

"Has my conduct ever been such as to make you believe — Have I ever done anything to — "

"You have never done anything that a modest woman should not do," he said, looking down into her eyes. "That is why I love you."

She uttered a little moan of shame and distress, and covered her face with her hands.

"You are unhappy, Paula, — that I can see plainly. Let me love you, darling; I beg you to let me love you."

The tender pleading of his tone tore her heart; but it also woke in her something of the terror with which his embrace had filled her.

"Why do I listen to you?" she demanded, letting her hands fall to her sides, and confronting him with anger and despair in her face. "You are saying what no honorable man would say to a married woman, and what no honorable woman would stay to hear. I am not happy, it is true; but that is no reason why I should be wicked. I have a husband who — But I cannot speak of him. He does not care for me; but he is good, and he trusts me, — oh, Heaven!"

"And I love you," he murmured.

"No, no; it is not love; it cannot be."

"Paula, it is love. I am not touching you. I will not even take your hand if you wish me not to. That you will simply give me permission to love you is all I ask. I was mad the other night; I have paid for it with bitter regret. I have promised never to repeat the offence. You trust me, do you not?"

"If I did not, I should not be here."

"Paula, do you love me?" he asked in a low tone.

"No —"

"Do not be cruel, darling. If you do care for me a little, why should you not tell me so?"

She locked her fingers together tightly, and made no answer.

"Trust me," he pleaded; "I will be true to the trust. It hurts me terribly that you should be afraid of me. Trust me, and try me, Paula."

"And what then?" she asked with terrible directness, turning upon him.

"Then," he said slowly, "then we shall understand each other. Then the burden that each of us is bearing will be lightened. I shall know, when I am sad and lonely and alone, that somewhere you are turning to me in spirit. Then, when you are depressed and troubled, when you find your pleasures empty, when you need sympathy and reassurance and tenderness, you will think of me, and know that you are first in my thoughts, and that at any time if you should need me I should be ready to come to you. *Do* you love me, Paula?"

"God help me, — yes!" she cried.

"Then come to me, darling."

Without lifting her eyes she drew nearer him, and laid her head upon his breast. As she did so, all her past life seemed to drop away from her; it was as if she had, of her own free will, written her name in the list of the damned. There was no passion in the kiss she gave him; indeed her lips hardly responded to his touch. He took her hand.

It was cold and listless, and would have fallen heavily if he had let it go.

The sense of right and wrong is an elusive thing. It sometimes escapes belief, and establishes itself upon a height whence it looks coldly down, unmoved by reason. In spite of her philosophy, some medium in Paula's mental vision gave to her conduct the black hue of sin. She thought she firmly believed in her right to Hagar's love. Her husband's neglect and avoidance of her were the virtual annulling of her duties to him. And yet, so strong is the subtle, unseen law which distinguishes between light and darkness and between good and evil, she experienced no comfort in turning to a forbidden source of the love she had not found in marriage. There was, instead, an inexpressible sadness and despair, as if she stood at the grave of her own happiness and honor.

There must be small satisfaction to a man in so listless and passionless a surrender. The love that is so sure of the limits and boundaries that the will has set up about it is, generally speaking, the love that fatally misunderstands itself. Hagar was probably honest in believing that it would be enough happiness to think of Paula, and know she was thinking of him; but love is like an indulged and petted child that is ever demanding more and more.

CHAPTER VII

ANGELA

In fact, the man and woman who, together or singly, attempt to defy the world's authority, are apt to find themselves involved in a set of embarrassments of which they were inadequately forewarned. Add to these what may be called the subjective difficulties which arise out of every relation in life, and there is the prospect that disaster will sooner or later overtake the pair. It takes a great deal of love or a great deal of courage to walk according to one's own lights when they do not coincide with those of one's neighbor; and the innumerable perplexities that will continually fret against the structure of an unlawful passion are in time almost certain to demolish it.

Now that it had come to the test, the positions of Paula and Hagar were suddenly and completely reversed. Paula stood helpless, and saw the opinions she had so ardently defended drift out of sight upon a sea of objections; while Hagar's deeply rooted scruples seemed to have been scattered to the winds by the vehemence of his passion. They saw each other but seldom; and even at those times the longing which had been running riot during the interval of separation gave place within the woman to an

overpowering conviction of her own dishonor in so much as giving him her hand to kiss; and yet she was slowly drifting toward dangerous shoals, as any one must drift who sets sail without a rudder.

Olive watched her as closely as possible, divining, rather than seeing, that some change was going on in her friend. Mrs. Goring was well introduced to the society of which she had long aspired to be counted a humble unit. She had chosen society as a substitute for domestic felicity, and socially she was happy. Some women choose one thing, and some another; Paula had turned to love. She called Olive's worldly ambition a weakness, a mania, a pursuit of phantom pleasures, a morbid appetite for husks; but her denunciations were nothing to the awful judgments Olive would have called down upon her head had she been made aware of Paula's moral straying.

Paula never mentioned Hagar's name to her friend; this of itself was the first thing to arouse suspicion in the mind of the astute lady. In that form of reticence Paula went too far for cleverness; but she was not capable of dissembling, despite the situation in which she had allowed herself to be placed. We all have our moral idiosyncrasies, our peculiar notions of honesty. Paula, for instance, would have been uncompromisingly frank where Olive would have practised what Paula might have called deception; but Olive had the same capacity for being shocked, and Paula for shocking her in other directions.

Paula would not make appointments with Hagar, though it was sometimes almost impossible to refuse, for he argued with all a lover's logic, and pleaded with all a lover's eloquence. She never allowed ever so plausible an errand to take her to the studio. She would not so much as write to him, unless something else than her own inclination demanded it. But when they were together she suffered him to be the interpreter of her own heart as well as of his own. If he said, "Paula, you do love me," she did not deny it. This negative form of concession did not shock her conscience like a more positive one, though it was not altogether a matter of conscience, either; for she had already begun to shrink from the consequences that inevitably follow the letting down of barriers.

To a woman it is the first delicate stage of wooing — the moment when love is revealed yet unavowed — that is most delightful. But the man's nature, coarser and less intuitive, demands the material assurance; and thus to a sensitive woman courtship is a succession of rude shocks, the awakening from an impalpable dream to a somewhat disillusioning reality. This would assuredly have been the case with Paula had circumstances allowed herself and Hagar the freedom of acknowledged lovers; for Paula's ideals were such as are seldom approached by man.

She was ardently affectionate; but she had always wilfully shut her eyes to what she would have called the baser aspects of life. Her husband had often told her that she knew nothing of the world, and

she had replied that she was glad to be ignorant. Married at eighteen, she had been so carefully shielded from the knowledge of evil as it exists in the human heart that she had practically no idea of what it meant to surrender herself to an unlawful attachment. But for the kind of affection she was capable of giving, Paula longed with all the romantic ardor of a schoolgirl, knowing no more than the dreamer of sixteen how impossible of realization were her fancies.

Hagar's impatience at this state of things flattered and reassured her, while it also filled her with a vague fear of the future which might supersede this tranquil present when he should have become utterly dissatisfied with the few concessions she was disposed to make. But now it was very sweet to dream of him, alone by the firelight in the evening, or in the twilight before dinner as she sat by the window and watched the shadowy passers-by.

Although she was apt to be restless away from him, she was never quite easy when he was near; for he had developed a certain imperative quality hitherto unknown to her, but of which she now felt the power, and feared it accordingly.

"Where are the theories you used to talk about?" he said to her one day. "They were not made for use, it seems."

He had been at work on the portrait, and afterward they had gone down into the library, Paula careful to keep Angela with her. To show his displeasure at this he would not sit down, but walked about the

room with one hand in his coat-pocket, fingering the mantel ornaments, the books on the table, and the long, drooping fronds of the ferns in the window.

"Oh, please do not do that!" Paula said, involuntarily putting up a warning hand. "They will not bear handling."

"They are like your theories, are they not?" he said, with a slightly sarcastic smile.

"Theories, theories, theories," sang Angela, fitting the words to a tune she had been singing softly to herself as she sat on the hearth-rug. "Mamma, what are theories?" she demanded suddenly.

"Did you ever blow soap-bubbles, Angela?" said Hagar, before her mother had time to speak. "Well, theories are very much like bubbles. They are beautiful and perfect, and look as if you might take them in your grasp; but if you tried to use one even for a plaything, it would burst in your hands, and nothing would be left. Your theory would have vanished into the air as completely as if it had never existed."

The child laughed, thinking this was one of the funny jumble-speeches with which Mr. Hagar sometimes amused her, and began her song again.

"Is it not so?" Hagar asked, turning a clouded look upon Paula.

"Not altogether," she replied.

"Then perhaps you will try to explain to my understanding how you are acting consistently with your supposed ideas."

Paula hesitated. "I cannot explain," she said. In fact, she had never been able to bring her hus-

band's name into a discussion of the matter. This was one of her refinements of scruple, and the one which kept them from any common understanding of the situation.

"No, you cannot. It shows how deeply the principles were grounded." The tone of his voice had changed from bitterness to a sadness which took the sting out of the words.

"And how was it with your own?" cried Paula, ready to spring the moment he had relaxed his hold upon her. "You who always declared that woman existed only to be the storehouse of all the virtues, — discretion, propriety, modesty, and respectability!"

"I never held such views, — not in that way," he protested, interrupting her.

"I have always believed that the same laws of morality that govern the woman should also govern the man. But you have completely abandoned your position. You would place us both on the same level, to be sure; but you would have the woman step down instead of the man's stepping up. It is you who have changed your point of view, not I. I still believe as I did before in the entire freedom of a wife who — who — "

"Who does not love her husband, and who is unloved by him," said Hagar, deliberately.

The blood started like sparks of fire through Paula's veins; but she replied firmly, "No; I never believed that as you mean it. There is something else that would have to come before my freedom. He must have taken — his own."

"Very well," Hagar said coldly. Nothing fans out the flame of passion so effectually as the practical breath of reason. "You are all alike. You play with the feelings that are life and death to a man, — feelings of which you are as incapable yourself as that child there; and then, when you have wound yourselves into a man's heart, you are ready to tear it to pieces, only to get out again. You are like a child who has touched a match to the window-curtain and is amazed to see it burn. The child says, 'Oh, I did not know it was going to do that!' and you say, 'Dear me, I have started a conflagration. I must get out of the way or I shall be burned myself.'"

Paula sat quiet under this reproach, offering no reply. Angela had wandered into the parlor, and was softly striking the keys of the piano, searching in her baby fashion for the notes that would harmonize with the song she was humming.

"How little a man understands a woman!" Paula said at last.

"How little a woman understands a man!" Hagar retorted.

She shook her head slowly. "Give us a little experience, and we understand them only too well."

Nevertheless, there was a quality in her feeling for him which was different from anything she had ever known. She was sometimes drawn to him in thought till the impulse to go to him was almost irresistible. Whether this sensation is altogether due to imagination, or whether the desire of one

soul for another may be transmitted along some subtle medium, as light is transmitted by ether, may, perhaps, never be finally determined. Paula believed, sometimes, that she had actually read his thought, ticked out as it were in her own brain.

They were strange, awful, yet delicious moments when she sat alone in the twilight, half expecting to see his face and form grow out of her thought and stand in visible shape before her. Her mind had by nature a mystical turn, though she required strong evidence to verify her belief in things that could not be seen. With her father's teachings and the inheritance of the nature which made his beliefs possible, she had also something of the incredulous spirit of the time, which requires that all things shall be seen, heard, felt, smelt, or tasted, in order to be set down as really existing. Yet she grew almost to believe in her power to come into spiritual touch with the man she loved, though she had never dared put this conviction to the test of confirmation from Hagar.

All in all, it was a season of strange exaltation to Paula. She felt, for the most part, as if she were walking about in a dream. She would sometimes look up half startled after speaking, wondering what she might have said, — so much that she did was done mechanically. She meant that every action should be guarded; but every now and then she would awake to the sudden conviction that she had in some way betrayed herself to her husband or to Olive, who continued to watch her with a suspended

disapproval. Of Ferris she saw very little, except at dinner and sometimes at breakfast.

Without attributing the fact to any specific cause, Ferris felt that his wife was drifting farther away from him day by day. She went out more, entertained more, and appeared restless when nothing special was going forward. He believed she was rushing things in a way to ruin her nervous system; but when he advanced this objection, she answered, —

"Very well, I shall have to drop it entirely. It is impossible to accept one invitation and refuse ten; and if I go out, I must receive. Otherwise we might as well move to the suburbs."

The ceremony of undressing Angela's dolls for the night took place just before her own hour for going to bed; and when Ferris was in the house, it was his custom to drop into the nursery while this duty was being performed. There was a large family of dolls, big and little, though only three of them were allowed the privilege of going to bed, and even they were sometimes neglected and obliged to sit staring at one another throughout the night.

"This one is Helen, and this one is Violet, and this one is Paula," said the small mother, as she laid them one by one on Ferris's knee. "Won't you unbutton Helen's dress, please, papa, while I comb Violet's hair? She does n't like to have her hair combed, and I always have to promise her honey for breakfast, or else she won't stand still. Her hair is so curly, you see, I can't but just get the comb through it. When you get Helen's dress

unfastened, you can take it off, if you want to; that 's her nightgown on the chair there. I don't hardly ever take off her skirt and shoes; it 's too much bother."

Ferris gravely proceeded to carry out these suggestions. The buttons being so small gave him some trouble; but he at last succeeded in fastening the last one, and handed the infant to its mother, who tucked the two into their little white bed.

"Is this the one you call Paula?" said Ferris, rather diffidently taking up the third doll, an exquisite creature with dark, curly hair.

"Oh, yes; but you must n't touch her, papa," Angela said, lowering her eyelids as if one must have an unheard-of amount of patience in dealing with these stupid men. "She does n't allow any one to take her but just me. She 's sensitive. I 'm sensitive, you know. I never let Nora undress me unless mamma is out; don't you know I don't? Paula is my favorite child; that is why I named her for mamma."

"Would n't you let me undress you?" asked her father.

She gave him an incredulous smile, not very flattering to his abilities as a nurse; but her look gradually grew more meditative, and at last she brought the palms of her hands softly together, and jumped up twice on her toes.

"Oh, I wonder if mamma would let you! Do you s'pose you could do it? You would have to brush out my hair, you know, and hear me say 'Nowa

laymy.' I have to say 'Nowa laymy' every night, you know, no matter how sleepy I am. Mamma always makes me. I'll go and ask her."

She ran into her mother's room, and returned with the required permission. Paula was going to a banquet of some woman's club of which she was a member.

"She is going to a party, papa; and oh, she looks lovely! I wish you'd come and see her, won't you?" She grasped his hand with all her soft, clinging fingers, and tugged at it, — a feeble force against all that kept him from his wife. Paula's sensitive namesake was lying forgotten on the floor. "Her dress is blue and white, papa, and the waist is covered with little white beads; she looks just sweet enough to kiss. I think she'd like it if you would go in and kiss her, papa. She always kisses me after she has got me ready to go anywhere. And I did, — I kissed her. You come."

"Oh, no, dear," Ferris said, strangely upset by the child's suggestion. "Mamma might not like to have me."

"Oh, yes, she would, — I know she would. She likes to have me; and of course — Mamma!" she cried, raising her voice.

At that moment Paula appeared in the doorway.

"Oh, here she is! Now, doesn't she look lovely, papa? Mamma, papa is going to kiss you; I told him you wouldn't care."

Paula looked down at the child with a smile; but Ferris could see that the color had mounted to her

cheek. He stooped to hide his own embarrassment, and lifted Angela in his arms. "You will kiss her for me, — she will like that better."

He held her toward her mother, who put up her jewelled hand to take the little chin in her fingers; but Angela, evading the touch with a mischievous laugh, threw a small arm round each neck, and drew their faces together. "Now kiss her, papa!" she cried, laughing with delight.

There was an instant's hesitation, short in duration, but long in significance; then their lips met. Ferris fancied that his wife shrank from the touch; but Angela was satisfied, and allowed herself to be carried to her own room. Paula, after bidding her good-night, rustled down the stairs, and a few minutes later they heard the front door shut and the coupé roll away.

"Now I will say my prayer to you," said Angela, when she had been painstakingly undressed.

The father's thoughts, running confusedly along the current of his own personal interests, were suddenly turned aside.

"Say your prayer to *me*, Angela?" he said, somewhat shocked.

"Why, yes. I say it to mamma when she is here, so of course I must say it to you to-night. When Nora puts me to bed, I say it to her. 'Nowa laymy — '"

Ferris interrupted her. If Paula had neglected to make the child understand the purpose and meaning of prayer, surely it was his duty to supply the

omission. It was difficult to express himself in accordance with Angela's understanding, for his own faith was itself in need of support; and the simple and unreasoning trust that he wished to impart to the child had in his own mind given place to a cold and shadowy sense of mere probability.

He did his best, however, striving to make up in assertion what he lacked in conviction. Angela listened with her feet curled up in her nightgown, sometimes smiling slightly to herself, sometimes fixing upon him a quiet and searching look that he found a little disconcerting. He felt that his words did not carry much weight; but he had the satisfaction that comes from having performed a duty according to one's best lights. Angela of course asked the usual questions, — the same that have been puzzling theologians for almost two thousand years. To these Ferris returned the answer that she was not old enough to understand, but when the proper time arrived she might hope to know.

"Do you understand, papa?" she promptly asked. The inquiry came with the sharpness of a deliberate sarcasm, and showed her father the hollowness of the ground he was treading upon. But somehow — who shall say by what or by whom? — he was inspired to answer, —

"No, darling; I do not fully understand. We are not allowed to know all about it now; for if we were, you see there would be nothing left to learn by and by. But perhaps, when you are older, we can talk about these things together and understand them better."

"Yes, perhaps we can. I suppose mamma knows all about it. We might ask her. She knows most everything. Did n't she look pretty in that blue dress? When I am a big lady, I am going to have a blue dress just like that, with beads on it. I think my mamma is the prettiest lady I ever saw, don't you, papa?"

"I do, indeed," replied Ferris, fervently.

"What do you suppose she is doing now? Let 's guess about it, way mamma and I guess about the stars and things. Sometimes we guess what Helen Linn is doing. I always guess she is sitting up to dinner and eating Charlotte Roosh, and mamma guesses she is all undressed and just getting into bed. Now, I guess mamma is walking in a big room with her dress trailing, and I guess she is smiling and talking to people, and they are all looking at her. What do you guess, papa?"

Ferris, always exact, looked at his watch.

"Well, I think she is sitting at a long table with a lot of other ladies. She has a big bunch of yellow roses beside her plate. Now she is taking up an oyster on her fork, and now she is leaning back and speaking to the lady who sits beside her. Her eyes are bright, and her cheeks are pink, and now she laughs and shows her little white teeth. The other ladies are admiring her, and wishing they were as prétty as she; only they ought not to do that," said Ferris, perceiving that he had created the necessity for pointing a moral. "They ought to be glad she is pretty, so that they can look at her."

"Yes," cried Angela, with unaffected eagerness, "same 's I am glad Helen Linn is pretty. She has got yellow hair like my doll Violet, and mine is only brown; but I don't care at all, of course."

These hours with his child were very pleasant, and Ferris took advantage of them whenever he could. At the same time he realized more and more that something was lacking in his life.

CHAPTER VIII

CERTAIN SCRUPLES

One who walks with bare feet finds many a hurt unfelt by those who go shod, and Paula's path did not differ from that of the average transgressor.

When a case resembling her own was attracting the attention of society, and she was forced either to look at it in the light of general opinion or to deny it as incredible, her eyes became opened with a clearer vision than that with which one is apt to regard his own affairs.

She was receiving a call one afternoon from a lady whom she knew well in society, — one of the set to which Olive had lately obtained an entrance. Conversation flowed on for a while in the customary channels, and at last the visitor said, —

"I saw Mrs. Goring at the theatre last night. She was looking very well; her husband was not with her, of course. She went with the Stonington-Browns, I think; at least, they were sitting together. Mrs. Stonington-Brown's brother was with them, — the young naval officer. He has a wife in Baltimore; but they are not — well — congenial. In fact, she lives with her father; and I imagine, if the truth were known, it is a permanent arrangement. He appeared to be quite taken up with Mrs. Goring,

fanning her and holding her opera-glasses, and talking to her exclusively. Well, one cannot wonder if she likes to amuse herself a little. It must be very dull, — her husband always playing billiards, drinking, and Heaven knows what else. Not that one depends upon one's husband for society, but it is rather a good idea to be seen with him occasionally. If I did not care for mine myself, I should feel it my duty to take him about for other women to flirt with."

Paula had been listening with a faint smile to what she would once have indignantly interrupted.

"I think you have expressed the general opinion very well, Mrs. Derwent. But you greatly mistake Mrs. Goring, who is quite a different woman from most of her set. You know, perhaps, that she is my intimate friend, and has been for many years. I know her to be all that is modest and discreet and womanly."

"Oh, mercy, I was not saying anything against her!" cried the lady, with a little shriek of affected dismay. "It is very chivalrous of you to come so warmly to her rescue, Mrs. Ferris, but I was not intending to ruin her character at all. Everybody knows what exalted standards yours are; but they are not those of the world, you know, and especially those of society, — no, indeed. One could hardly expect that. And with such a boor of a husband as Mrs. Goring has, really I should consider myself excusable for almost anything."

"But Olive would not," Paula interrupted, speak-

ing rather coldly. "If you knew her as I do, Mrs. Derwent, you would find that her theories of life are quite different from your own."

"Possibly. It is as one feels, of course. Opinions have changed very much within the past few years. Nowadays it does not matter how a man makes his fortune, so long as he manages to get money into his hands; and in the same way a woman may have a very good time if she makes herself popular enough to be sure of her position. There is really plenty of latitude, Mrs. Ferris, in spite of your old-fashioned point of view. It is very sweet of you to be so conscientious, and I suppose it is a pity everybody does not feel the same; but you will never succeed in bringing this wicked old world up to your ideals, — dear me! it makes me shudder to think what an exertion it would require on the part of us common mortals. For myself I do nothing very bad, certainly; but it is apt to give offence sometimes if one tries to be too squeamish, — and nobody believes in it, you know; they all know it is put on, — that is, with most of us. You are an exception to the general rule in everything, dear Mrs. Ferris."

Under the hem of Paula's gown her foot tapped the soft carpet impatiently. Her brain whirled in the effort to reconcile her belief in the freedom of the individual with what she knew to be a strong moral sense. Her own point of view differed widely from that of Mrs. Derwent; but how did it differ? It is a dangerous thing to transplant a system of philosophy from the soil to which it is indigenous to

one foreign and by its essential nature unfriendly. The sweet unselfishness her father had brought to bear upon all the practical issues of his life had not made its due impression upon Paula; she carried the standard of radicalism without having learned the full meaning of the principles it represented, or recognizing any of the modifying conditions that life and character always bring to bear upon theory.

The difference between her position and that of Mrs. Derwent was that one grew out of a perverted but sincere belief, and the other out of a mere easy-going lawlessness; but Paula resented the fact that outwardly they resembled each other as two specimens of fruit from the same tree. Her mind struggled to go back far enough to reach the branching point, but failed. The mind itself was not profound enough to grasp what has indeed baffled many a stronger, clearer intellect; the channels of her thought had not yet been deepened by experience.

Her face burned as she imagined Mrs. Derwent at some future time defending her conduct with a shrug of those shapely shoulders. Such sympathy was certainly less to be desired than condemnation. She had asserted Olive's blamelessness; but that of itself was a distinct admission that, had Mrs. Derwent's idle surmises been true, a certain blame would have attached itself to Olive's conduct. And what, then, of her own?

Paula made no appointments with Hagar; but sometimes she would happen to mention casually that she should go at a certain hour in a certain

day to pay a certain call, and she was almost sure to meet or be overtaken by him either in going or coming. Then, as she went out more than formerly, the two met more or less often in a way that neither was directly responsible for. Paula meant her behavior on these occasions to be very discreet; but the world as a whole is intuitive rather than reasoning, and its impressions are more often telepathic than deductive.

When the report that Hagar was infatuated with Mrs. Ferris came to Olive's ears, she went straight to Paula, who listened in a frigid silence.

"You don't know what you are doing, dear," said Olive, gently, yet with an uncompromising decision.

"Excuse me, I think I should know better than any one else what I am doing. As I said to you once before, I am old enough to take care of myself."

"I am not at all sure that you are. You are allowing Mr. Hagar to follow you about in a way that is manifest to everybody but your husband, and there is no knowing when it may reach his ears. Indulgent as he is, he would not be likely to carry his lenience to the extent of letting you peril your reputation; and that is what you are doing."

"How dare you talk so to me?" cried Paula, her eyes flashing. "I will not bear it. There will have to be an end to our friendship forever, if you continue to interfere in my affairs."

"I cannot help it," Olive said resolutely. "If I were never to see you again from this day, I should

speak just the same. I cannot keep silent, and let you ruin your own happiness and Roger's."

"Yes, you are thinking more of him than of me; I know that very well."

"You have no right to say that, Paula."

"Oh, I am not accusing you of injustice in the matter. I am the only one in the wrong, of course. He is perfect; he never turns from the beaten path of honesty and virtue. He does not know what it is to be tempted."

"No man has lived to the age of thirty-seven without having known temptation. Goodness is no negative quality, Paula, in a man of Roger Ferris's character; and if you believe the path of honesty and virtue to be a beaten one, it shows that you are blind to the spirit of the times. For my own part, I think that grass grows under the feet of the few that tread there. Look at my life; you know what it is. How do you think I bear it?"

"I am no heroine," said Paula, shortly.

"Nor am I. I live in one silent protest against the situation in which I have been placed. I could shriek out my wrongs to the world sometimes if it would help me to do it. But it would only make life harder for me and for him; and besides, I have promised to be true to him, and I must keep my word. That man will need me some day, and in spite of his neglect and cruelty, I am his wife, Paula. Nothing can change that. That is all I think of when I am in despair. I simply must be true, — there is no other way."

"Yet all that does not save you from being gossiped about. I have not told you what Mrs. Derwent said to me. She saw you at the theatre with the Stonington-Browns, and she said you and Lieutenant Dallton were flirting all the evening. I did not believe a word of it, of course, but you can see how easily people are induced to talk."

"That was not true," said Olive, simply. "But you yourself do not deny — "

"Have I confided in you, Olive?" demanded Paula, lifting her head haughtily.

"Oh, Paula!" implored Olive. The tears sprang to her eyes. "Do not turn away from me like this. I am your best friend, next to your husband. You are in great danger, both from yourself and the world about you, who will not fail to make the most of every shred of material you give it. I have said nothing of him. But what must he be to allow you to risk your good name, the esteem of your friends, the love and respect of your husband and child, for what he can give you? Do you believe a man who would offer people an opportunity to handle your name lightly is the man who can give you one hour's real happiness? Your judgment must answer that question; I know very well what my own reply would be. I can understand better than you think what your temptation is, — the glamour and fascination of being loved in that mad fashion. But do not believe in it, Paula, it will not last; and when you have given up everything for that, and lost that too, — what then? Paula, you know I am speaking

of this only because I love you. Won't you listen, dear; won't you trust me? I can see more clearly than you, for I am not blinded by my feeling. Won't you put your hand in mine just for this once, and let me guide you? I promise to lead you in the right way. And after the worst is over, you will thank me, dear; I am sure of that."

Paula was weeping dejectedly, with her elbows resting on the arm of her chair and her face turned away from her friend.

"You talk as if I were a criminal, Olive," she said, half laughing hysterically through her tears, "and you a member of the Salvation Army."

"Can't we go away somewhere together? We are both tired, and should be better for a change. We can take Angela and Nora, and go into the country. It would be lovely there now, and Angela would enjoy it so much. Will you go?"

"But where? None of the hotels are open yet, nor will be for weeks to come. We should starve, if we did not freeze."

"I will find a place," said Olive, with determination. "I shall surely hear of something. We can try it, and if we do not like it we need not stay. Will you promise to go?"

"Yes, if you will go as my guest."

"Oh, no; I could not think of that. It is very kind of you to suggest it, but I am not quite bankrupt. I have some money; and Horace, you know, would not offer the slightest objection."

"It is the money you have saved up for your

summer outfit," said Paula, looking at her with conviction, the tears drying on her cheeks.

"No matter what I have saved it for. I can make my ginghams myself, and save all it would cost me to go away for two or three weeks. Even if I had to go without them, it would be nothing to the privilege of doing something for you, who have done so much for me."

"Oh, Olive!" cried Paula, between tears and laughter, seizing her friend's hand and pressing it to her own warm cheek. "You are a better woman than I. What have I ever done for you except given you a paltry bit of jewelry or some other trifle, when I had more money than I could spend on myself? And you would go without your summer gowns for me. That is generosity, that is true unselfishness. You are a noble woman, and I am not fit to be your friend. I wonder you do not despise me too much to care for me."

It was, however, not so easy to find the ideal farmhouse, steam-heated, within access of the markets, and with three sunny, comfortable rooms, *en suite*, and at present vacant, as Olive had imagined. The horrors of improper drainage made Paula suspicious of everything that offered the nearest approach to their dream of a haven of refuge; and when the necessity of an indorsement from the local board of health added itself to Olive's other difficulties, she began to realize that their outing would have to be postponed until the opening of the summer hotels. Meanwhile Mr. Goring was

taken ill with a low form of fever, and the plan for fleeing from Paula's danger had to be entirely abandoned for the present.

The portrait was not yet completed. There had been one excuse and another for Hagar's not working. One day he had a cold, and another Angela was not quite well. Still another was Paula's birthday; and they made a little feast for her with Angela's tea-set, while the canvas reposed in the closet. Paula had profited by Olive's warning; she was discreet, but in an artful way that did not diminish her hold upon Hagar. No woman can deliberately set to work to make herself unattractive to a man. Hagar had kept his word to the letter; he had respected her scruples, though he still persisted in trying to argue them away. It was singular that their positions should have become so completely reversed, — Paula upholding the standards he had thrown down and would willingly have trampled upon.

Their few casual walks together were the pleasantest part of their intercourse, for then Paula had not to be in the least afraid of him. They talked of everything, running up against a snag of disagreement now and then, but finding in argument only additional opportunity for admiring each other's cleverness. Paula was quick to turn his weapons against himself, — a woman's usual resort in battle, — but Hagar had the greater resources. They quarrelled and made up like two children, over issues that neither of them cared for; though Paula, who

liked always to be in the right, was really vexed when she came out worsted from these engagements. They meant more to her than to Hagar, who often argued for the mere pleasure of seeing her ruffle up and grow angry; for her part she could not understand why he should delight in scoffing at her most cherished ideas.

But there were days when Hagar was almost angelically good and kind, and it was all too certain that Paula loved him as she had never loved before. He wound himself more and more into her heart as the days went on, — days which she spent in dreaming over their last meeting, or looking forward to their next one. She had yielded to the stress of his love, still preserving the outward semblance of resistance, but not knowing where the next current would drift her. Angela was her sheet anchor; she clung to the child more closely than ever, except during the times when she denied herself that innocent companionship as a punishment.

Her love for Hagar and her love for her child were so different in quality that no comparison was possible between the two, yet on that ground must one day come the decisive struggle. Paula knew that nothing on earth could tear her from Angela, but all the time his fingers were winding more closely about her heartstrings. Sometime one must give way; for she saw, even through the mist that rises about love and blurs the vision, that this state of things could not go on forever. To her it was pleasant as it was, for she could still deceive herself

into believing that Hagar was merely a dear friend. A woman's love for a man is a strange mixture of all the forms of affection, — that of mother, sister, and wife; but, alas! it is not so with the man, — Paula was learning that. A man's love may partake in some degree of the paternal and the filial; but these qualities do not balance the others so nicely as in the woman's.

Hagar overtook her one night as she was walking home through the Public Garden. The hyacinths were in blossom, and the air was laden with the perfume of their vari-colored bells. Some of the hardier trees were beginning to show a tinge of grayish-green; the subtle feeling of spring was in the air; a sort of elusive warmth alternating with a moist chill, — a phase of the season only to be matched in delight with the first frosty breath of autumn when the atmosphere is golden with falling leaves.

Paula was sauntering along the broad walk, drawing deep breaths of the cool fragrance, when she heard a quick step behind her. She checked herself on the point of turning round; and the next instant Hagar came up beside her, and without a word took possession of the small parcel she was carrying.

"How did you know I was here?" she stammered, in the first confusion of the surprise.

"By instinct, I think. Something would not let me work, and I obeyed the impulse to come out for a bit of fresh air. At least, that is what I thought

I was coming for. I know now that my good angel must have whispered in my ear. This is how she rewards me when I trust her, you see. Do not walk so fast; we have fifteen minutes together if we make the most of it."

"But you are not going to walk home with me. Remember, you did that the night before last."

"It was a week ago," Hagar said.

"And you would have done the same last night if I had not forbidden it. It will never do, — cannot you see?"

"I am afraid I can see only one side of the question."

"But I must consider the other. You know how people regard such a friendship as this. No one would understand. You are a man; you know the world."

"It is not worth taking into consideration. It is stupid and prejudiced and unfeeling, always."

"But we have to live in it. I am a woman, and I am not strong enough to defy its opinions. I thought I was, but I find I am not. It is a narrow, blind creature, but we are in its power. We are its slaves, and it holds the whip, — twenty lashes for this and forty for that. It demands an awful price for any violation of its canons, — its whims, rather. Oh, I am sick of it all!"

"We are sick of the world because it will not let us have each other, and we cannot be happy apart. Dearest, where we two were together would be our world. We need not care for the rest, — why should we?"

"I have heard my cousin John talk like that," Paula said sadly. "But I remember once when he was eulogizing Thoreau to a conservative friend, praising his courage in breaking away from the world and its conventions, the friend replied, 'That is all very fine, but do you realize that Thoreau was indebted to civilization for the very axe with which he felled the trees to make his clearing?' I recollect his exact words; they somehow fastened themselves upon my memory. We cannot escape from civilization and the conventionalities that have grown out of it. The whole earth is bound about by them."

"It is time they were broken, then."

She looked at him with the play of amusement lighting for a moment her troubled eyes.

"How strange it is to hear you talking like that! I cannot get accustomed to it, and I have no arguments ready for you except the one you were always bringing forward, — that a woman must be the man's conscience, a sort of moral constable to enforce the law. You considered that all-sufficient once."

"I have different ideas of right and wrong now. That was before I loved you, Paula, or at least, before I knew it. A great experience opens the eyes. I was blind then, now I see."

"Oh, I did not know I should have this to contend with!" said Paula, with a sigh.

"If you were unprepared, so also was I. One could hardly have foreseen so complete an abandonment of principles. In my case I have simply lost

sight of minor issues because I can think of nothing but my love for you; in yours, you are weighing petty scruples against love. The capacity of the scales would not need to be very great."

"You will never move me by sarcasm."

"How can I move you, then? Paula, do you not see that where there is great love, there is the law? Men and women have been a law unto themselves before now. Are you less brave than the rest, or is it that you love less? How is it, darling? You do love me; you have told me so in everything but words."

"I can tell you of two women who tried to be a law unto themselves. One was Mary Wollstonecraft. Have you read the letters to Imlay? They would be a poor support to your argument. Of the other some one has wisely said that she had the courage of her convictions, but not the indifference. She was tenderly loved and cared for, and her dearest friends approved her course; but, nevertheless, she suffered all her life as a sensitive woman must suffer who knows herself classed by the majority with the creatures we pass in the streets and shrink away from. The majority does not recognize fine distinctions; it has but one name for the woman who, whether through law or lawlessness, makes a path for herself to walk in."

"Good heavens!" cried Hagar. "You believe in plainness of speech, at all events." The color had come into his face.

"Yes; my father taught me that," said Paula, quietly.

He reached out one hand toward her impulsively, then recollected himself and let it fall at his side. The western sky was reddened with the sunset; a rosy dusk was beginning to descend upon them. But they were not alone. Stray pedestrians, sauntering like themselves or hurrying homeward, were coming and going over the intersecting walks. The young man gave an impatient groan.

"Where can I see you alone?" he broke out suddenly. He turned to her eagerly, speaking rapidly and in a low tone. "Paula, come to the studio for once. I will not try to persuade you against your own will, but there are some things I must say to you. It is only right, only fair that I should be allowed to say them. Just for once, Paula, say you will come, dear."

They had reached an opening in the iron fence at the western boundary of the Garden. "You must leave me here," Paula said. "Give me my package, please. We have company to dinner. I ought to be dressing this moment."

He handed her the parcel with a reproachful look. His easy-going, good temper was of the untried sort; it galled and irritated him that he might not walk with Paula when he pleased. A man who has always managed to get his own way without any special effort is not apt to realize how the habit of selfishness has grown upon him until, in the course of events, he finds himself the victim of a longing for something out of his reach. Then the honey of his amiability begins to turn sour, and the dogged

obstinacy latent in even the sweetest natures, and sometimes most predominant there, makes its appearance upon the surface.

This sort of fermentation was going on within Hagar. It frightened Paula a little. She did not fear any disastrous consequences for herself, but she saw that he was likely to go to the farthest extremity of discontent; and she realized, with a sense of loneliness and loss, that the delicate yet definite, the elusive yet to her wholly satisfactory, springtime stage of their love was over. She could not imagine herself wishing for anything more than simply to know that he loved her; to meet him now and then unaware, and feel the shock of surprise mingle with the thrill of delight; to speak hand in hand sometimes, and then part to dream of each other until they met again. She not only did not desire more than this, — she was as unconscious as a child of the fact that to most persons her having gone as far as she had with Hagar would inevitably imply that she would continue to walk, step by step, straight to the extreme limit of her folly. Nothing is more unjust than the world's judgment of such a woman, especially the judgment of men, which, so far as motive is concerned, is far more cruel than that of women. The man sees from but one point of view, and draws but one conclusion; his knowledge of his own kind has forever biassed his mind to one line of reasoning. Few relations in life are worth the price which a woman finds herself obliged to pay for them in the esteem of men; and Paula,

though as yet she little dreamed what the significance of this affair would be to the world at large, or even what it was likely to be to Hagar, was already, in what might otherwise have been the first happy flush of the experience, blindly groping toward that conclusion.

As she looked at him over her shoulder, the impassioned tenderness in his blue eyes melted her heart to him.

"You are trying to evade me," he said. "I see you do not wish to come. Perhaps you do not care for me enough for that; perhaps your love stops just short of that point. I wish I could give you some of mine."

He had a little trick of pausing abruptly in a speech when she thought he was going on, thus confronting her with the sudden necessity for a reply which she had not prepared. At this time, as at others, she could only stand before him with lowered eyelids, burrowing the toe of her shoe into the soft gravel of the walk.

"How is that?" he urged gently, after a moment's silence.

"I do not know —"

"But I know. You will come."

This, too, was unexpected, and she felt a sudden sense of his power over her. If he had, as she had expected he would, said reproachfully, "I know you will not come," she would no doubt have returned him a light answer and thoroughly have enjoyed the hurt look it would have called into his face. But

now she knew that he was probably right, and she should go as he desired.

The sound of wheels on the pavement caused her to look up.

"Oh, let go my hand," she cried in a whisper. "There is Mrs. Derwent. Yes, I will come — perhaps — at least, yes, if you will only let me go."

As she stood at the crossing to let the victoria roll by, its occupant gave her an affable bow. She also turned in her seat to follow Hagar's retreating figure until it was lost to her view among the shrubbery. When the two women met next afternoon at a reception, Mrs. Derwent greeted Paula effusively.

"Oh, Mrs. Ferris, I have been wishing to see you. I have something to say to you. It has been on my mind ever since the afternoon I called, you remember, and we were speaking of Mrs. Goring. I am afraid you misunderstood my meaning entirely. I had not the least idea of intimating that she was indiscreet with Lieutenant Dallton, — did you think I had? As I thought over our conversation afterward, I was afraid I had given you a wrong impression. I merely meant to say that if she *had* been flirting — do you see? — she would be quite excusable, *considering*, you know. But of course we are all liable to misinterpretation now and then; one can hardly stir out of doors without offering the maliciously inclined occasion for comment. No sensible person pays any attention to the idle reports she hears. We should have time for very little else, should we, dear Mrs. Ferris?"

One day, about this time, Angela appeared somewhat feverish, and complained that her throat was sore. Paula, always thoroughly alarmed at any symptoms of illness, sent at once for the doctor, who pronounced it a slight attack of tonsilitis.

"Will it be serious?" asked Paula, trembling with foreboding.

"I cannot tell, Mrs. Ferris. I should think not. But we generally attribute tonsilitis to a reduced state of the system, — an impoverished condition of the blood, owing to some cause or causes."

"Impoverished? How can that be? She has been perfectly well all winter; she has been dressed and out of doors almost every day," asserted the mother eagerly.

The doctor bowed courteously. "No doubt. She is slightly anemic, however. Have you noticed that she has been looking a little paler than usual of late?"

"No, I have not. She has seemed so well. I thought she was quite strong. What can I do? — Shall I take her away? I will do anything you think best."

"Give her plenty of fresh air, sleep, and nourishing food. By and by, if she does not seem to gain, you might take her into the country."

For three days Paula thought of nothing but her child. On the fourth she remembered Hagar, but with a deeper sense than before of the barriers that separated them. Angela was out again in a few days, though she looked a little pale and fragile after her illness.

Ferris was quite as disturbed and anxious as his wife. It was earlier than they had been in the habit of closing the house for the season, but he urged Paula to take Angela away at once. The season was unusually advanced for this time of year, and they decided that it was best to go northward in order to escape the hot weather, which in a few weeks more would probably be upon them. Paula had a double reason for wishing to get away from the city; but Ferris, who was as yet all unconscious of her danger, felt a sense of personal hurt at the eagerness with which she made her preparations for departure.

Paula had selected as the most favorable spot for her summer sojourning a location on the southern slope of the White Mountain ranges. They had had some experience of the place, and had found the hotels there very comfortable. Paula had informed no one but Olive of her plans, not wishing any intimation of them to reach Hagar's ears. Her promised visit to the studio would be a parting one, and their farewell for many weeks; but she did not wish him to know this until she should be safely out of town.

One morning, as she was busy in her room among overturned drawers and gaping closets and the necessary trunks and packing chests, Miss Maury made one of her sudden appearances.

"Dear me, Mrs. Ferris, what are you doing? I thought I should find you in the library, all ready for a little chat. Is n't this dismal? I hate such

confusion, don't you? I don't believe I had better stay; I could n't stop more than five minutes anyway. I 've something to tell you, though, if you will make a place where I can sit down half a minute. I have been to see your Mr. Hagar."

Paula gave a slight start, and then turned away to hide the surprise and anger in her face. "Have you?" she said as indifferently as she could, folding a long scarf of black lace.

"Why, do you think I ought n't to have gone?" demanded the girl, detecting the note of displeasure in Paula's tone. "He invited me, you know, — a special invitation. It is n't as if I were a society girl, Mrs. Ferris; I go everywhere that a man would. I have completely abandoned all personal feeling in the matter. I go as a newspaper."

"Were you interviewing Mr. Hagar?"

"Not exactly. We talked, of course, and I cannot tell what use I may make of it. I am thinking a little about doing an article on the leading portrait-painters of Boston for our Sunday edition, and I should of course include him. I see that you don't approve my having gone there. Well, I used to have those notions myself, but I 've got bravely over them. No one knows how I have suffered in doing it, but I 'm completely emancipated now. Of course, I understand that any one in your position has to be more or less conventional; and you are so reserved and so sort of cool and dignified that I suppose you could not be expected to sympathize with an impulsive creature like me. I 'm sorry,

but I cannot help it, and it is not the first time I have been entirely misunderstood. I 'm getting to expect it from most people, but I am awfully sorry you don't understand, Mrs. Ferris." The girl put up her lips in an injured pout.

"I cannot see how it is of any consequence whether I understand or not. I am only a little surprised that you should go alone when I had offered to take you."

"Oh, as to that, you know I am used to going about by myself. I can get a good deal more out of a person when I am alone with him, if you will excuse my saying so. It was very good of you to offer; you are always so nice to me, Mrs. Ferris. There is one thing I wish you would do some time, — take me to Mrs. Garrowell's. Now I *must* go."

Within a day or two of her departure for the country, Paula dressed herself one afternoon to go out. She did not order the carriage, though the rain was falling steadily, but let herself out of the house without telling any one where she was going. Angela had appeared so much better for the past few days that she had dismissed her most poignant fears regarding the child; and her own trouble, the grief of parting with Hagar, weighed heavily upon her. She was weary with the labor of packing, and preparing the house to be left with servants; the work, added to her anxiety and the complications of feeling, had made her face pale and her eyes dark and heavy.

Hagar answered her irresolute tap without a word.

He drew her inside the room and shut the door, then took her hands in his own and looked down into her face. She gazed back at him, her lips drooping at the corners, the deep shadows about her eyes making them look large and mournful. They were dull, as if with weeping; in fact, they began to fill with tears, and her lip quivered.

As he looked at her, a smile came slowly into his eyes. His smile was always like a burst of sunshine. It had come to Paula many a time like the sudden break of clouds after a rain; but now she gave a convulsive sigh, and turned away her head. She knew what the visit meant, if he did not.

When she had sunk into the chair he had placed for her, he took a low seat at her feet and began to unfasten and pull off her gloves.

"Why, your hands are cold, — the poor, dear little hands!" He took them palm to palm, and held them firmly in his own warm clasp. Paula leaned back in her chair, with her eyes half closed; she was even paler than when she had first come in. "What is it, dearest?" he asked solicitously. "Are you ill? Let me get you a glass of wine."

"No; I am only tired," she said, rousing herself and calling the ghost of a smile to her lips. "Let me have my hands now, please; they are quite warm."

"But no; I want them. Let us talk, dear. There are so many things I want to say. I have been reading something since the day we met in the Garden, — Mary Wollstonecraft's letters to Imlay. I am ready for you now; bring on your arguments."

"Do not jest," said Paula, faintly.

"I am not jesting, my darling. But in reading those letters I saw that you had missed the whole meaning of the situation. It was not her relation to the man, but his character, that caused her suffering. Imlay was nothing but a brute. He was tired of her, — there is the key to the whole situation. Do you imagine she would have been any happier married to him? She would have been bound to him then; whereas in this case she had at least her freedom when he was ready to fling her off."

"Her freedom! What would a woman's freedom be worth to her when — " She stopped with a shudder.

"Paula, why should we talk of these unpleasant things?" he said with the utmost tenderness. "It makes us both miserable, and it has no bearing on our case. Surely you trust me, surely you believe that you have only to place your hand in mine and I shall be as true to you as if we were bound to each other by all the laws on earth. What is it that makes the bond of marriage? Is it the approval of the minister who speaks the words, or the sanction of the law he blindly represents? No, dear; it is the mutual love and trust of the man and woman who enter into it, — the rest is only external. Don't you remember how vehemently you used to maintain that? And now that you have convinced me and made me love you, you have forsaken your principles, little deserter of the truth."

"It is not that. I believe just as I did."

"But you are changed," he said seriously. "What has done it? Have you ceased to love me?"

She looked down, and her lip trembled.

"Oh, I don't know," she said at length; "I cannot tell. When I am away from you, I am miserable. I think if I could only come to you I should be happy; but when I am with you — "

He put one arm gently about her waist. "Yes, dear; when you are with me — "

"Oh, something comes between us, I do not know what; but it is something real and tangible. It seems to be thrusting us apart, and then — then a change comes over me. I am afraid of myself and of you. I feel as if I must escape, or something terrible would happen. I almost hate you." She turned away, and tried to draw her hand from his clasp.

"Hate me, Paula?" he said in a low voice. He took her delicate chin in his fingers, and turned her face toward his. "Look at me, darling. Do you hate me now?"

She did not speak; but Hagar did not repeat his question. He drew her head gently to a resting-place upon his shoulder, and for once she did not resist. He stroked her hair and her hands, whispering now and then a loving word; he dared say but little, for fear of rousing into action those slumbering scruples of hers. They would have but a short nap at best; and it was only while the sentries slept that he might approach the citadel.

He marvelled as his finger-tips went lightly and

soothingly over the wayward hair that would never lie smooth, and the white listless hands from which their owner had stripped the rings, at the strange perversity and inconsistency of women. Paula's belief regarding the social institution of marriage — hers by inheritance and education, doubly sacred and significant because so closely interwoven with the beloved memory of her father — had completely failed her at this crisis of her life.

He could not believe it was for lack of love, shy and reticent as she had always been. She feared the world, the bitter, cruel, and malicious judgments that would fall upon her, — that was natural. Hagar was young; for the first time in his life he was stirred to a complete forgetfulness of all considerations save those of love. He believed his passion was great enough and strong enough to wrap her about and shield her from the consequences that the world sometimes visits upon a moral departure. For himself he did not care. A man is not made to care. Faces are not averted from him; the social ban is not issued against him, although for the woman who makes possible the error for which the world pardons him, there are the red-hot ploughshares of misjudgment, the sharp stones of scorn, and the black darkness of condemnation.

By nature and such training as had been given her, Paula was urged to rebel against all the restraints of human law. Marriage, the safeguard of most women, was of all social relations the one

she had been taught most to distrust. Of itself it had not brought her happiness, having united her to a man who had early discovered his own mistake, and who simply endured her as a lesser evil than the publicity of separation. She was absolutely sincere in interpreting Ferris's habitual sadness and silence to the fact that the bondage of their marriage weighed heavily upon him. If she had been told that every moment of his life was one of heartache for himself and regret for her, she would have held the statement a sufficient reason for never again trusting the opinions of her informant. That the union of her parents had been on the whole so congenial that her father had never desired to put his theories in practice, she believed to have been merely an accident, like most other happy marriages.

Paula longed, like all women, for the small evidences of love, — the little demonstrations, the flatteries and caresses, the perpetual assurance of her power to charm. Hagar's passion was like a mighty whirlwind that would have swept her at its mercy but for the bulwark of protection which his tender regard had built up about her. She knew what it was to feel perfectly safe in the midst of a surging passion. What she really feared now was herself. She knew how weak she could be where her affections were concerned, and she felt the possibility of being gradually overcome and persuaded to do his bidding.

A sudden knock at the door caused her to start

and spring to her feet, despite Hagar's reassurances. The summons was repeated; but at last the visitor went away, and they heard his footsteps going slowly and reluctantly down the stairs. The corridor was silent once more, but the spell was broken for Paula. She would not sit down again, and she moved about the room restlessly, looking at the different canvases without seeing them, picking up bits of pottery or china and setting them down, hardly aware of what she was doing. At last a blue-and-white cup that she was moving about slipped from her fingers and fell to the floor, breaking into a dozen pieces.

"Oh, I am sorry!" she cried, recalled to herself at sight of the disaster.

"It is nothing," Hagar replied. The cup was one of his most cherished possessions. He had drunk from it in an old Scotch kitchen, and purchased it of its owner by means of his bonny blue eyes and a few well-placed smiles. Now, however, its loss seemed a trivial matter compared with the state of Paula's mind, which was every minute growing more and more unfavorable to argument.

He came toward her hastily, as she stooped to gather up the fragments. "Let me do that, dearest. Do not get down there in the dust."

"I have them all now, I think, unless there are some behind this canvas."

As she spoke she moved the frame a little to look behind it; the next instant she rose to her feet and stood confronting him.

"Well?" he said with a smile; but Paula did not answer. She lowered her eyelids, and attempted to move past him among the litter of objects on the floor.

"Paula, what is the matter?" he said, seizing one of her hands. "Wait a moment; look up at me, please. Surely there is nothing criminal in my making a study of Miss Maury's head."

"Criminal, no. You have chosen an unfortunate word."

"Why unfortunate?"

"Because," said Paula, with a cold smile, "the average person does not shudder at criminalities."

If he felt any anger, he confined the expression of it to his own thoughts. Paula's feelings were the first to be considered, and were just now undoubtedly the stronger.

"Don't be angry with me, darling. I have painted the portraits of hundreds of women before, and felt no more interest in the subjects themselves than as if they had been pieces of glass or pottery. Don't you remember the talk we had one night about dancing, when you said I ought not to be troubled because another man put his arm about your waist, for the reason that it meant nothing either to you or to him? Can't you understand that it means even less for me to sit and reproduce on canvas the color and outlines of a woman's face? Don't be cruel to me, Paula; don't punish me for sins I never committed."

"How many times has Grace Maury been here?"

"Only twice. She asked me if I should like to paint her, so I took a canvas and just sketched her in. You saw that it was only a study."

"I saw that it was not a striking success," said Paula, with a curl of her lip.

"Well, don't be cross with me, darling," entreated Hagar, softly.

But she held herself stiffly erect, looking at him like Hera from the cloud.

"I knew Grace was a goose about men, but I did not believe she would deceive me. Neither should I have supposed you would care to paint her. You said yourself she is not pretty."

"She is not pretty. She is somewhat unusual, and, in a way, interesting. She would work up rather well with the right accessories, if one were in need of a fresh subject. She has a piquant face that lights up effectively when she is speaking."

"Go on."

He laughed outright. "Why, you jealous little person! What shall I do, — take my palette knife and slit the canvas? It would not give me the slightest compunction, I assure you; though I love to see you look like an offended queen, — my queen," he added under his breath.

Paula was not appeased. She eluded him, and walked over to the chair where her cloak lay.

"No, you are not going," said Hagar, quickly, though quietly. His manner had undergone a sudden and complete change. He came toward her and took the garment from her helpless hands.

"You have parried and evaded me long enough. You cannot expect that I shall continue to bear it patiently. What is going to become of us? We cannot go on in this way any longer."

"Why not?" she said, trembling in every limb.

"Because you belong to me," he broke out. "You love me, or you would not be here. You do not know what love means, it is true; but such as a woman is capable of you have given me, — is it not so? Tell me; it is best that we should understand each other."

She was looking in his face with a dazed expression on her own. As he gave her wrists a slight shake, she answered, without qualifying the question, "Yes."

"Very well, then. If we love each other, can we pass our lives apart? I tell you, Paula, I cannot give you up. We have gone too far. Love has mastered me; I am not responsible for myself. You must go away with me. You shall make all the conditions, in everything else I will submit to your lightest wish; but I must have you under my care and protection. I must know that you are mine, all mine. There is no way out of it," he said, speaking in a low, rapid voice, with a gloomy sadness in his tone that contrasted strangely with the joy love is supposed to bring. "Your concessions have thus far been very slight, but they are irrevocable. The old life is over; we must begin the new one together."

She continued to look at him, dumb with terror.

This man was a stranger to her. Hagar, first gentle and indifferent, then tender and supplicating, had dropped as a garment the phases in which she had become familiar with him. He, or love through him, was master now. With such consciousness as she had left, she was terribly afraid of him; he must have perceived that, though there was no relenting in his face. Her wrists were white where his fingers gripped them; her whole frame shook in his grasp.

"Promise me," he said. "You need not be afraid of me if you will only give me your word. All I ask is that you will go away with me somewhere, and let me take care of you for the rest of our lives. I cannot give you the luxuries you will be leaving, but I can make you comfortable; and if you love me as you say, you will be happy. Come, promise."

"Give me time," she gasped, her figure drooping.

"Time! What have you been thinking of all these weeks? I have been waiting in torture, while you, it seems, have not yet made up your mind. Good heavens! there is some difference between a man's love and a woman's! A woman will temporize and deliberate and calculate and waver, and a man must clench his teeth and wait. No matter if the happiness of his life is at stake, no matter if life itself is trembling in the balance, she must filter her love by slow processes through her mind, until it has been found to stand the test of expediency. Yes, the very quality you used to despise once is standing between us now. For the sake of expediency

you would thrust me out of your life this moment if you could, send me from you forever, and forget that you ever loved me; but you cannot do that. No, Paula, you will not leave this place until you have given me your word that you will go away with me. Do you not see that the sooner you promise the better, as it is inevitable?"

"God in heaven!" cried Paula, lifting her head with a desperate movement. "Yes!"

The word came from her lips as if it had been wrenched from her by some physical convulsion. She swayed in his grasp, and her knees bent under her. Almost before he could release his hold of her wrists and catch her about the waist, she was sinking to the floor.

He gathered her up in his arms and laid her on a couch, sweeping it clear of the promiscuous articles, — pipes, brushes, books, and newspapers that were scattered over it. She was quite gone; her parted lips were blue, and so were the half-closed eyelids. He gave his utmost efforts to the restoring of her consciousness; and after what seemed a long time she drew a quick, shallow, fluttering breath, and then another. Her eyelids quivered and unclosed, then fell again.

Hagar lifted her drooping figure, and placing himself beside her, drew her head to his shoulder, and folded his arms about her as gently and tenderly as if she had been a child. His own face was pale; he felt the reaction from the severe emotional strain, but he devoted himself to reassuring her with

every loving word at his command. She no longer resisted him, but as she leaned against him, raised one arm and laid it about his neck. Her hand stole into his, and her fingers closed round it. She knew what he did not, — that this was the last time they were to meet in this way.

When the time came to go, she broke down utterly. She wept and clung to him with her tear-wet cheek pressed to his. On his part, safe in the false security of her promise, Hagar attempted to soothe her with pictures of the future, when they should live for each other alone. At this Paula ceased to weep, but a stony calm took the place of her agitation. She sat listless, her hands lying heavily in her lap and her eyes gazing hopelessly before her, the tears still hanging on their lashes.

Hagar was somewhat puzzled by this sudden apathy; but no man who has had ever so limited an experience of women is capable of the emotion of surprise in the keenness in which he once knew it. He wiped away her tears, and endeavored to make her smile; she paid no heed to him. He went out to call a carriage for her, but when he returned she was sitting just where he had left her. He led her downstairs and put her into the coupé, Paula still preserving the stolid listlessness of the brute creature that is going unconsciously to its death. She did not look at him as her lips framed the word "Good-by;" and the carriage rolled swiftly away, and was lost to Hagar's sight in the confusion of drays, express-wagons, and electric cars.

When she reached her own room, her calmness again deserted her. She threw herself on her knees upon the floor, stretching her arms out across the bed and burying her face in them, sobs tearing her throat until the pain was almost too great to be borne. The storm spent itself after a time; she heard Angela's voice outside the door speaking with an inquiring inflection, and in response a subdued remonstrance from Nora. Afterward their footsteps went carefully downstairs. She lay there, her limbs cramped and aching, but indifferent to the pain, until she heard her husband come in. She could hear him inquire if Mrs. Ferris were in the house, and Angela ran out from the library.

"Yes, papa; she is in her room, and she is crying. I wanted to go in, but Nora would n't let me. Nora says she is crying about me. Do you think she is? I think I might go and see, if you will go with me, papa."

"I think Mrs. Ferris is feeling bad about Miss Angela, sir. Miss Angela has n't seemed quite so well to-day."

A sudden chill struck to the mother's heart; she ran to the door and opened it. "Angela, come up to mamma," she called.

"Oh, there she is! Yes, I am coming, mamma; I am coming. Did you think I was ill? What made you cry? Was it about me? Nora said it was about me. It 's funny for a big lady to cry. Oh, dear! it makes my legs ache to go upstairs."

Paula drew the child into her room, and shut the

door. Angela was breathing rather quickly, and her mother felt her all over. She could span the small arm with her thumb and finger; and the pulse in the slender little neck fluttered as if a living creature were imprisoned there. It seemed to the mother as if the tie that bound her to her child had been given a sudden wrench, tearing her heart open. The thought that she might possibly lose Angela stabbed her with a far keener anguish than she had suffered in parting with Hagar, though she did not now compare the two feelings. In fact, she had again for the time being lost sight of him; all feeling was merged in the instinct of motherhood.

She slept but little that night, rising often, and going to the small bed in the adjoining room to be sure that Angela was sleeping, and that her breathing was free and regular.

The next day was the one that had been set for their going; but it was still raining, and it was decided that the journey should be postponed until fair weather. Both Paula and Angela looked pale at the breakfast-table, and Ferris, solicitous as he was for his child, could not fail to notice that the mother looked worn and utterly wretched. She was eating nothing; and he ordered another dish to be prepared for her, and insisted upon her tasting it. But every mouthful was like a bit of dry cotton; it was almost a physical impossibility to swallow. Ferris, deeply concerned, forgot his habitual reticence. He came to her side and felt her forehead to see if it were hot; he himself prepared her a cup

of tea, and bade her drink it, whatever the doctors might say.

"You are very kind," Paula managed to articulate through the threatening tears. At that moment she seemed to see the spectres of dishonor and treachery — spirits that she herself had invoked — looming above her, and Ferris was all that stood between her and their grasp. She was torn with a hundred emotions, all antagonistic to one another; but if her husband had held out his arms to her then, she would gladly have crept into them for safety. As a child who knows nothing of the storm outside, but who vaguely wishes to see what is beyond the door, creeps back frightened by the first glimpse; so Paula, with the sudden realization that her only hope of happiness and security lay with her husband, would eagerly have caught at his outstretched hand.

But he did not offer it. Habit and conviction were too strong; he had learned not to force his caresses upon her. He had not passed through his seven years' experience of married life to come out weaker and with less self-control than he had entered. He had learned to bear and to forego and to be silent. Nevertheless, he let her feel his nearness and his watchfulness.

A brief visit from Miss Maury was the only break in Paula's long day. Her trunks were packed, and there was nothing to do but sit and watch the raindrops chase each other swiftly down the window-panes. Miss Maury showed a grieved and offended

surprise at the sight of Paula's luggage strapped and ready for the journey.

"Why, are you going away to leave me?" she said, with one of her childish pouts. "Oh, I think that is just too bad, Mrs. Ferris!" She was really half in earnest.

While she stayed, neither of them mentioned Hagar's name. It seemed to Paula that Grace looked at her watch very often, and had the appearance of passing the time somewhat impatiently before meeting an appointment. She could not help wondering if the girl were going to pay another visit to the studio.

CHAPTER IX

A SECOND PARTING

THE rain had ceased next morning, though the sky had not cleared. Ferris went with the little party to the station, and saw them comfortably settled for their five hours' journey. An unexpected pang stabbed Paula when she came to take leave of him. He had been so kind and good, and he looked so weary and sad behind the smile he had put on for their encouragement, that she suddenly realized that she had been selfish and unheeding, and that, as they were bound together by a tie neither of them chose to break, she should have sought in some way to make the bondage a little less irksome to him. He was weary of life, like herself. For him, as for her, marriage had proved a failure; but by mutual effort they could have rendered it less insupportable, they could have lifted the weight if ever so slightly from each other's shoulders. If it had not been for Angela, she would almost have been tempted to run after him when he stepped off the car just as the train began moving.

When a little more than half their journey had been accomplished, they were delayed by the breaking of some part of the locomotive, and were left standing in the open fields for an hour and a half,

while the crippled engine crept away and another was sent to take its place. Then they proceeded on their way again.

It was mid-afternoon, and Paula sat by the window trying to read, while Angela in Nora's lap beside her was half asleep, when the train gave a sudden lurch that threw them all to the floor, snapping like dry twigs the supports of the revolving chairs. There was a splitting and crashing sound, as when a cart is driven over a bed of chips, and a sensation of sinking; then with another abrupt jerk the car came to a stop.

Paula had been thrown down upon her face with the back of a chair across one shoulder and arm; but she freed herself in an instant, and got upon her hands and knees to look for Angela. The floor of the car sloped sharply to the side, at the same time being pitched forward on one end. It was impossible to stand upright; but men were already outside the windows, helping the women and children through. Angela had been shielded by the nurse's arms as they were projected forward together; she was frightened and crying a little, but not hurt. A big bruise was swelling up on Nora's forehead.

As Paula drew herself up by one of the broken supports, a voice just below her at the window spoke her name. The tone was sharp and strained; but she recognized it even before she turned her face to look into Hagar's.

In the suddenness of the catastrophe and the sort

of stupid bewilderment that attends such shocks, there was no room for any ordinary sensation of surprise.

"Put your arm about my neck," commanded Hagar, briefly; and she obeyed him unquestioningly. She felt herself drawn through the open window and placed upon the ground; then Angela and Nora were lifted out.

Without exchanging any words, they walked away from the wreck and sat down upon the sloping bank, Paula clinging weakly to Hagar's arm. Even then they did not speak at once; but when she looked at her companion, Paula saw that his face was deathly white. It was no time for reproaches; indeed the realization that they had all narrowly escaped a terrible death was too acute to allow of any lesser feeling.

"Where were you?" Paula asked, when she could speak.

"In the smoker." He took out his handkerchief, and wiped the perspiration off his forehead; his hand shook. "God!" he said; "I would rather die a thousand deaths than suffer as I did for those few moments while I was getting myself clear of the broken chairs and tables. I did not know where you were, nor how I should find you. I knew you were in one of the Pullmans, of course, but — oh, heaven! what sickening possibilities suggested themselves. If I were a praying man, I should be on my knees this moment."

"I know how to pray," said Angela. "I can say *'Nowa laymy.'*"

She had accepted the accident with the simplicity of a child, to whom an earthquake is a no more surprising occurrence than a summer shower. "Why, your coat is torn," she added suddenly; "and there is blood on your cheek. Look, mamma!"

There was, indeed, a cut on Hagar's temple, and another on his wrist; there was also a large, three-cornered rent in the sleeve of his coat. They discovered a little stream of running water by the side of the track, and Nora wet some napkins from their lunch-basket, with which Paula bathed the scratches; for they were hardly more than that, though ragged and ugly-looking.

By this time they had begun to be recalled to the existence of the other passengers, who had flocked out from the cars. Everybody was inquiring of everybody else to ascertain if any one was seriously hurt. It appeared that no one had been killed, though the two men in the baggage car were badly bruised and shaken up, and were to be considered as having almost miraculously escaped. The engineer and fireman had jumped in time to save their lives.

The cause of the accident had been a working train on the single-track road. The express, having been delayed by the first mishap, was supposed to have gone on, and the working train had run down for the purpose of making some repairs. On rounding a curve, the engineer of the express had seen before him the other engine but a few yards away; their own approach had already been heard, and the

other train had begun to move slowly backward at the moment of the collision, to which fact was due the preservation of more than one life.

The wreck was a rather hideous sight. The great engines lay prostrate, — that which had carried the express with a ragged rent in its boiler and its drive-wheels crushed to pieces beneath it. It had been lifted upon one end by the force of the collision, and then had crashed heavily down, tearing up the track and twisting and splitting the rails and sleepers, as if they had been made of paper. Down the low embankment lay the baggage-car with the tender driven into it almost out of sight; its floor was torn open in great gashes, through which a chaos of trunks could be seen, tossed about like so many children's blocks. Confronting the whole was the locomotive belonging to the working train, — an almost shapeless mass of bent and broken iron.

The forward Pullman had been forcibly lifted from its trucks and was lying head-foremost halfway down the embankment; there was a yawning gap between the floor and the side-panels as it lay upturned. Paula shuddered and turned pale as she thought of Angela's frail little body thrown down amid that confusion of splintered glass and broken furniture.

"Let us not look at it," she said. "Thank Heaven no one was killed. It seems a miracle."

They went back to one of the rear cars, and found some seats. No one could tell when relief would come. When they had waited a few moments, Paula

declared the close atmosphere of the car to be insupportable. She wandered to the door, and Hagar followed her. Beside the track was a strip of young woodland that stretched away toward some low hillocks.

"Let us go and see if we cannot find some flowers for Angela," Hagar said.

"I do not see any flowers," replied Paula. She hesitated a moment, and then said, "Well, we will go a little way."

When they had wandered into the wood for the distance of a few rods, she turned abruptly to her companion.

"Why are you here?"

"I might return the question," Hagar responded. "Why are you here?"

"That does not concern you. You have followed me. You had no right to do so."

"Had I not? I thought you had given me the right. The promise you made me implied something more than giving yourself to me for an indefinite future. You became mine from that time, and every slightest act of yours has its meaning to me. When you attempted to flee from me, I could only follow."

"I was not attempting to flee from you. I came because Angela was ill, — dying, for all I could know, before my eyes. She is the dearest thing in all the world to me, — dearer than you or any one else, though I love you to my shame and dishonor. I will never leave her," Paula said, lifting her head.

"I have not asked you to leave her."

She looked at him, and the expression of her face changed. "Oh, I do love you," she breathed softly, her eyes filling with tears.

He extended his arms, but she turned quickly away.

"Not here. Let us go back. I am uneasy about Angela; it seems to me every moment that there will be some new disaster. And help may have come. What if they should go on without us!"

She hurried back, and Hagar followed her. When they were in the car again, she took Angela in her lap and devoted herself to the child, bestowing no attention upon Hagar.

He was happy just to lean back in his seat and watch her, the sound of those few words still ringing like music in his ears. It was the first time she had spoken them of her own accord, and their unexpectedness made them doubly sweet.

A lady who had occupied a seat near Paula before the accident was walking about the car, and stopped to speak to them.

"Was your husband much hurt? I saw that his face was cut. I hope it is nothing serious. We have had a narrow escape, — all of us."

The color mounted to Paula's face, and Angela laughed aloud.

"She thinks Mr. Hagar is papa! Shall I tell her, mamma?" patting her mother's cheek. "My papa is in Boston; he could n't come with us because he had, oh, such a lot of work to do! He is the loveliest

papa you ever saw; he plays house with me just as nice as Nora does. This is Mr. Hagar. He has painted a big picture of me. If you will come to my mamma's house, you can see it, can't she, mamma?"

This episode did not render Paula any more gracious to the man who had created the opportunity for it. The next two hours passed in dreary waiting, with the rain coming down softly upon the roof of the car.

"Do not blame me," he said once in a low tone, as their eyes met. She made no answer, but turned away without giving him the silent reassurance he desired.

At last the relief train arrived, and the passengers were transferred to it through the drizzling rain and over the soggy ground, Hagar carrying Angela asleep in his arms. It was almost dark, and they could hardly see their way past the wreck. Paula stumbled along, feeling utterly weary and wretched, loving him more than ever, longing for the protection and comfort it might have been his to give her, yet all the time angry with him for having made it necessary to repeat the pain of parting.

When they were at last under way again, she turned to him coldly.

"May I ask how far you are going?"

She frowned as he mentioned the name of her own destination, — not that she was afraid of his causing her any serious annoyance, but she shrank from the necessity for planning to evade inquiry

and avoid comment. She said nothing, but shut her lips tightly and leaned back in her seat.

"I promise you I will go back to-morrow, if you only give me an opportunity to talk with you a little while in the mean time," Hagar whispered.

She did not reply to this, and gave him no further chance to speak with her. It was evening when they reached the end of their journey. Paula was put into the hotel coach, which drove away, leaving Hagar standing on the platform. She did not see him in the supper-room; and when she looked over the register of guests, she failed to find his name. So he had gone to another hotel, not to annoy her further. A certain reaction of feeling toward him came over her. No woman is insensible to delicacy and consideration, especially when they are prompted by love.

She wrapped herself in her shawl and sat on the piazza alone all the evening, gazing at the shadowy outlines of the great mountains grouped about. The rain had ceased, and the clouds had begun to break and roll up in heaps. Behind them the moon peeped out, then hid herself away again, as if she could not bear to look long upon the perplexities and troubles of the swarming inhabitants of earth.

Paula knew not what would come to her on the morrow; but she felt sure it would be something she would have to meet with all the forces at her command. The soul fights at such terrible odds with the body that it must summon all its strength if it would win. She shrank from the ordeal of

meeting Hagar, while at the same time she was lost and lonely without him. She dreaded to be called to account for what he called her flight, and feared to be forced into further promises.

She loved him, — there was the great danger. She longed for his presence that moment. She could have lifted her voice and cried out if the sound would only have brought him. He was so near, yet if he were chained on the other side of that long, low, triple-peaked mountain that lay at the west like a sleeping giant with his shoulder to the sky, they could not be more effectually separated from each other, according to the world's calculations.

If it were only distance that divided them! If a voice had suddenly called to her out of the sky, "Run a hundred miles along this road and you shall find him," how fleetly her feet would speed over the ground, and how short the distance would seem! Or if the voice had said, "He is hidden in the depths of those great forests; search, and when you have discovered him he shall be yours," of what account would be time and danger and darkness, when she knew that by persistent effort she might surely come to him at last?

Love is like thirst. The love of a pure woman is the desire to sip, drop by drop, the draught that allays that thirst, yet does not slake it. Paula was one of the many contradictions of the general belief that a woman cannot love outside the limits of human law and preserve her purity. Legalized, or unlegalized, love is what a man and woman make

it, — neither more nor less. Paula would have drunk of the cup of love as simply as a child; she felt the unreasoning wonderment of the child that she might not have the gift she desired. Civilization and the growth of science and philosophy have as yet done so little for us that the highly developed individual of to-day feels the same rebellion against denial as that to which some Aryan baby may once have given expression when he reached out his chubby fingers to the moon, and cried because he could not reach it.

Since no subjective voice that she could recognize had cried, "Halt!" to Paula, it would be difficult to say why she hesitated on the brink that was already crumbling beneath her feet. She had but to jump, and Hagar's arms would receive her; yet she did not jump. Certainly a small hand was holding her back. If she made the leap, it must be with Angela in her arms, or to leave the child forever. The latter alternative was both physically and morally impossible; and the time had not come when she could bring herself to face the former.

She had told him that day that Angela was the dearest thing in all the world to her, and it was true; yet, for all that, she was torn between the two as a lamb at the mercy of lions. She was striving to harden her heart against him once for all; but the night and all the rest of life seemed empty without him.

Coming out from breakfast in the morning, she met him in the large hall. Angela ran up to him,

and her effusive greeting made a cover for him to say in an undertone, —

"Walk up the road at half-past nine. You will pass a farmhouse, and beyond that there is a path leading into the woods on the right. Follow that a little way, and I will meet you."

They had a long interview, quite different from any of the others. Nothing that Paula had been dreading happened. Hagar neither reproached her, nor attempted to exact new promises. He seemed at last to realize with what a wrench she must separate her life from the conditions into which it had grown, to give it into his keeping; and though he did not in the least relax his hold upon her, he admitted sadly that he must wait.

On her part, deeply moved by this patience and consideration, she yielded more than she had ever yet conceded to his demands. They sat side by side on a low, wide, weather-beaten boulder that might have been designed for a pair of lovers. Under their feet was a smooth carpet of pine needles, over their heads the sighing boughs rising and falling gently in the morning air. The sunlight filtered through, and lay upon Paula's knees and her clasped hands that rested on them, touched the red-brown spirals of her hair, and lighted the pale, pure tints of her lips and cheeks. It fell also upon Hagar's sunny head and his broad shoulders. His eyes were heavy and troubled, and his face was haggard with sleeplessness.

He turned and silently put out his hand. She

gave him hers with a short, broken sigh; and he held it in his palm, looking down at it sadly before he raised it to his lips.

She turned her head and looked at him compassionately.

"You are tired," she said.

"I slept only an hour or so," he answered.

For a moment more they did not speak.

"You understand why I came. Even if it had not been for Angela — "

"Whatever you do must be right, — only I am not giving you up for all time, Paula; understand that."

"I do not ask it; I could not. The way must open to us. But then," she added quickly, "it cannot. There is no way. Oh, if it had all been different!"

"If you say that — " he began.

"Hush! Oh, do not begin it over again. I think you and I must have talked to each other in the night when we were asleep. I have not said anything this morning, and yet you understand me, I am sure."

"I am trying to; but it is to you I am making the concession, not to the world and what it has the assurance to call duty."

"I know," she said, her voice trembling. "It is I who am asking it, not the world; and — you love me well enough to grant it."

"Don't misunderstand me, Paula. I am only waiting for you to bring yourself to take the step. I do not set any time, but my patience cannot hold

out forever. A woman's love is not like a man's, and I must wait awhile, that is all. You must make up in quantity what you lack in quality."

He spoke quietly, bending back and forward the tip of her little fourth finger.

"You talk as if all the sacrifice were on your side," she said, with a dreary bit of a smile.

"When a man has made up his mind, it is not easy to wait."

"Do you think I do not know that?"

"I think there is still something for you to learn," he said, with a reflection of her own smile.

"I am not thinking of myself," she returned quickly. "That I must suffer is not all that concerns me. It would be easy if that were the only thing I had to cause me sorrow. You say a woman's love is not like a man's. I think they are different in this, — that the man thinks only of his own despair, while she suffers doubly, yes and more than doubly, because he must suffer too."

"You are right, Paula. We are all selfish. Perhaps the difference is more in quality than in quantity. But I am young and strong; I have conquered everything that has ever stood in my way. Yet all my strength goes for nothing, because you, a slight creature I could carry for miles in my arms and never feel the weight of your body, will not say one little word. You do not know the helplessness I feel as I sit here, and see you right beside me, and know that the next moment almost must separate us, perhaps — no, by Heaven, it shall not be

forever! You will not escape me, Paula; do not dream of that."

He crushed her hand in his so that she suddenly cried out with the pain. He let it go, and reaching out his arm, drew her to him. They both knew that the moment of their parting had come. The life seemed to Paula to be ebbing from her. His strong right arm was about her, holding her close; yet in another hour's time she would be standing alone, and knowing that he was being whirled away from her with that awful "perhaps" between them.

Hagar's frame shook like the strong trunk of a great tree when a mighty wind is tossing its branches, and tearing off their leaves. The dull though poignant despair that Paula felt was in him mingled with the mad impulse to strip love of all adventitious considerations, and take her forcibly, whatever the cost to either of them. Those who have lived the average safe and sheltered existence, securely walled about by circumstance, and with no sufficient incentive to induce them to scale that barrier, can have little conception of what it must cost one to stand still, knowing that the best gift life has to give him is on the other side of that wall, and that his arms are strong to climb it. How often do we take credit to ourselves for not climbing, when the only reason for our not doing so is that we have not the strength to lift ourselves over!

"You must not lose your train," said Paula, at last. He had, indeed, no time to waste.

"I cannot leave you here," he whispered. They rose to their feet, facing each other. Hagar's face was drawn and distorted. She was almost terrified as she looked at him.

"Oh, yes," she said, forcing a smile. "You must go," she added, the distress returning to her countenance. "It will not do for you to stay another day; I could not bear it. If you love me, make haste. Good-by."

The moment of their final hurried parting was such as comes to no person twice in life; and once having been passed is in itself the assurance of immunity from any future ordeal of equal intensity. Live so long as she might, Paula would never forget the sight of Hagar's face bent over hers, nor the storm of passionate grief and despair that swept her on its current as a bird is swept along the path of the storm. She hardly knew when he left her; but she found herself after a time, kneeling on the ground, with her face sunk in her hands as she bowed her head over the cold, unresponsive stone where they had sat — ages ago, it seemed — side by side.

It seemed to her afterward as if some prophetic instinct must have told them both that for them this was to be the end of all hoping and dreaming. It was no ordinary parting between two people who have even the remote possibility of meeting again as lovers, but more like the separation of death to those who have no assurance of immortality.

She had suffered so terribly in letting him go,

that the compensating relief of knowing that the worst she had been dreading was at last over was correspondingly great. As she sat on the piazza that night in the semi-darkness, thinking of him back again in his dusty studio, the grandeur of the mountains, not so far away as to seem to be holding themselves aloof, nor crowding so near as to be oppressive, contributed to this feeling. Among the mountains one experiences a sense of power and protection not to be felt in a level country. No one can lift up his eyes unto the hills without receiving some help therefrom. They teach the lesson of resignation and the littleness of individual concerns; but beyond that is something more, which the spiritually modest do not attempt to define.

Some faint ripple of their influence played about Paula's troubled soul that night, and hushed its complainings for a time.

CHAPTER X

A NEW RELATION

PEACE is a tide that has its ebb and flow. Its shores were bare to Paula next morning. The sunlight lay on the mountains, showing ragged scars on their mighty sides where some great boulder had broken loose and gone crashing down the slope. Their tops were bare of vegetation; they had been standing there for centuries, lifting their heads to a merciless heaven. Scattered over their surfaces were myriads of small animals and infinitely greater numbers of insects. One might go mad in the attempt to estimate the relative proportion of each infinitesimal bulk to the great mass on which it dwelt; yet they came into existence, suffered, and died, and to each one the meaning of all life was what it brought to him as an individual. To one it was grief, to another indifference, to another peace and exultant hope. They all passed into the same silence, and none returned to tell whether that silence were really the utter absence of sound, or music that our ears cannot hear. The hunter, with the warm, bleeding body of one rabbit slung over his shoulder, crushes underfoot the sun-bleached bones of another, and goes on without knowing it.

Whether he knows or not, signifies but little; what does signify is that two tiny creatures that were once called into existence by a law which they neither made nor had the power to break, have now no more part in life than if they had never been.

Paula was not the first conscious being who has been baffled by the awful mystery of death and the still more impenetrable mystery of life; but the sea of doubt still beats with undiminished force upon the shore of human speculation. In the little world of the individual all the operations of the universe go on. He feels them, but he may not understand them; he guesses at their meaning, but whether rightly or wrongly he cannot know.

Paula turned to the world of science for distraction from her sorrow, and found it in some measure. When a young girl at school, she had been very fond of botany, and she now sent for some books and began to study in the woods and fields. The doctor had recommended that Angela be kept out of doors as much as possible; so on fair days the three would leave the hotel soon after breakfast and roam about all the forenoon, sometimes sitting by the bank of the river or in the shade of some roadside tree to rest, or wandering deep into the woods, trying different paths and guessing where they should come out.

One day toward noon, they were grouped under some trees by the river-bank. Angela, sitting beside Nora, was throwing pebbles into the water, and Paula, with her open book on her knee, was

puzzling over a plant she had found in a bit of marshy ground where a little brook widened out to join the river.

To-day her interest in the work was purely factitious. She had had a letter from Hagar which had thrown her back into the depression from which she had been bravely trying to emerge. Life, in spite of all it had showered upon her, seemed utterly empty and barren, — sickening, even. She felt almost ready, in her aching loneliness, to say the word that should bring him to her side. They were away from home, — a few hours would take them out of the country. The step would certainly cost her less now than when the routine of regular life had begun again. She felt this bitterly, rather than calmly and reasoningly; for she was in the irritable state of mind and body that nervously sensitive persons suffer when they have borne all that they are able to bear at one strain. Still, she was endeavoring, partly in self-defence, partly for the sake of Angela, to forget self, and in that way tide herself past the present state of rebellion and moral anarchy which would of course subside like all forms of revolt.

She bent her head over her book, in the desperate effort to make herself believe that the identity of the little plant was the only object of her interest her mind at present recognized.

"Angela," she said, "I wish you could help me. I cannot get any clew to this wretched thing. It seems to be a sort of vegetable comet, not to be

classified. And yet, of course, its horrid little name is in this book somewhere. I will find it if I have to stay here all day. 'Leaves netted veined; flowers usually in fine —'"

"Excuse me," said a voice behind them. "The plant is endogenous."

They all turned with a start; Nora giving vent to a characteristic Celtic sound, not exactly to be called a shriek, but best described perhaps as a howl. Then they sat looking at each other, rather than at the unexpected new-comer, Angela drawing her lips together in a prim little smile of amusement directed at her mother.

"Oh, thank you," said Paula, in some confusion.

All at once she rose to her feet, letting the scattered leaves of the plant she had been dissecting drift to the ground. Her book followed them, and would have turned a somersault down the bank into the stream if Nora had not sprung to catch it.

"Why, you are John Wilton!" Paula cried. "I am sure you are; don't tell me you are not. I am Paula; don't you remember me?" She held out her hand.

"What, David's little Paula?" The man's keen, steel-blue eyes lighted up with amusement.

"Yes; and this is my baby. Angela, come and shake hands with your cousin John."

"Was n't it strange I should recognize you?" she cried, when the stranger had taken a seat beside them, and lifted Angela to his knee. "It was so long ago that I saw you last. I used to sit on your

knee just as Angela is doing now, — do you remember? And do you live about here?"

"Yes, in the farmhouse just across the stream there. I live alone with my old housekeeper in a decidedly unconventional style. You would be horrified, Cousin Paula, if you could see my domestic arrangements."

"I shall see them, but I am sure I shall not be horrified. I am going to visit you very soon, even if I do not get an invitation. Is there a bridge across this river?"

"Yes, a mile below here. I never use it unless I make a business of harnessing up my Rosinante and going to the village for supplies. I cross here in the most primitive way, by taking off my shoes and stockings and putting them in my pockets."

"You ran away up here to get away from people, I used to hear my father say. Did you succeed in doing it?"

"To perfection," he replied with a careless laugh. "My housekeeper has no more mind than a cow; as for neighbors, I have none. A man need not have neighbors against his will, you know, Cousin Paula."

"Oh, do not be so formal!" she cried, laughing gayly. "I was simply little Paula to you when I was a child; let me be Paula now. I shall call you John; I think it must be rather agreeable to you to hear your Christian name again."

"From little Paula, yes."

"Why, you are a man of the world! I could believe you had just been graduated from a course of afternoon teas."

"It is sixteen years since I left the world."

"You are in touch with it, for all that. You will invite me to visit you, will you not? For I mean to come, decidedly. A genuine relation, — one of my father's own people! I cannot let you escape me."

"I will invite you with pleasure. I am not sure that we have a tablecloth in the house, or possibly we have one on the table every day. I don't notice. Mrs. Sparrow cooks my rye-bread and my eggs and bacon. They are cooked well, and that is all I can tell you about our establishment."

"Mrs. Sparrow! Is she little and trim and nervous, as her name suggests?"

Wilton burst into a roar of laughter, not at all suggestive of the drawing-room. "If you are coming to visit us, you will see for yourself. I will leave that as a delightful surprise."

They made arrangements to meet next day at a place just below them, where the bank was shallower and the stream deeper. Wilton was to be there with his boat. Paula was quite excited over the event. She wrote Ferris a long letter that night, being under the necessity of telling some one of her discovery; and she could hardly get to sleep for anticipation of the morrow.

They were prompt to their appointment, and having walked from the landing to Wilton's house, a short distance up the road, they found the place on the whole rather attractive in appearance. It was an old farmhouse, originally white, but now nearly denuded of paint, somewhat mouldy-looking,

to be sure, but inside large and roomy, with square rooms, deep window-seats, and tight-sliding shutters, low ceilings, and ample fireplaces.

It was a man's house, not to say a hermit's. Most of the furniture had been purchased by Wilton from the former owners, — a farmer and his wife, who had sold the place to follow their sons West, — or there might have been even less of furnishing than there was, for the tastes of the present proprietor were very simple. As it was, the parlor chairs and sofas were stiff and uncomfortable, being covered with slippery horsehair, the dreary odor of which pervaded the shut-up room. The inevitable "centre table" was draped with a hideous red-and-black stamped cover, and destitute of books or ornaments. On the high mantel-shelf were a broken plaster cast and two small pink-lined sea-shells, evidently left by the original occupants as too worthless to carry away, rather than having been placed there by their successor in an attempt at decoration. The wall-paper was of an elaborate, old-fashioned pattern, repeating over and over again a scene in an English park with an impossible summer-house and several extraordinary ladies and gentlemen posing in the foreground, and in the perspective a mammoth deer perched upon the edge of a precipice.

Paula gave the apartment a sweeping, comprehensive glance, and then retreated across the hall to the more cheerful sitting-room, which at least bore an air of habitation. There was here no attempt at arrangement. A bottle of ink, a tray of pens,

loose sheets of paper, some books, pipes, and a bag of tobacco, a pair of shabby gloves, a broken horse-bit, and a package of turnip-seeds were some of the articles that adorned the table. There were no ornaments, not even a picture on the walls; and the mantelpiece was coated with a thick fur of dust, — the accumulation of many weeks. Paula half stumbled over a pair of old shoes as she crossed the room.

"I am afraid you will become disgusted with our establishment before dinner-time," Wilton said, laughing, as he picked up the shoes and flung them under the sofa. "Mrs. Sparrow says I keep my barn in better order than my house. That is only the license of a joke, however; for my animals have, like myself, learned the art of being comfortable without luxuries. You see this room is peculiarly mine. I do not permit Mrs. Sparrow to cross its threshold. *When* it is swept, I sweep it myself. If I should let her dust it and 'put it to rights,' as she expresses it, I should not be able to find anything I wanted for a week. There is a 'sweet disorder' that I like about it now. But I fully expected to entertain you in the parlor. My worthy and well-meaning Sparrow spent nearly the whole morning in preparing it for your reception. I can hear her stepping about out there in the hall now. She is wishing she dared protest against your being in here."

Mrs. Sparrow, in direct contradiction to Paula's anticipation, proved to be a placid, comfortable person of the rag-doll pattern, expressionless as to

features and shapeless as to figure. Her apron-strings were tied in the back, and must therefore have made the circuit of her waist; but where they did so was not revealed. Her sparse gray hair was combed smoothly down each side of her head, and carried in two slender wisps to the back, where it disappeared under a plump and well-worn chignon which suggested a fungous growth, but which in reality consisted of a cushion of curled hair, insufficiently covered with a faded brown "switch." She was a woman with no definite indication of a mind above cookery and scrubbing, but with a development of heart not always attained by the more intellectual. Her one panacea for grief was "a good cup of tea" (alas, boiled!), and she relied upon a pan of hot doughnuts for driving away the acute attacks of melancholia to which Mr. Wilton was subject. She had no sense of humor, though a sort of benevolence shone like a high polish upon her face. It was impossible, even after fourteen years' experience, to predict what would cause her to laugh, which event indeed occurred but seldom, and when it did was accomplished with an abdominal convulsion and little or no change of expression.

She served them an excellent dinner, sitting opposite her employer at the head of the table, and greatly concerned because Nora preferred not to sit down with the rest. Wilton ate in a perfunctory sort of way, bursting into a laugh every now and then, as Mrs. Sparrow's regretful eyes wandered through the open window to the yard where Angela's

nurse was strolling contentedly about, watching the hens and chickens.

"Country life is a study, Paula," he said. "There is nothing new in the city, whereas the aboriginal mind is a never-failing source of interest and entertainment. I find it so, and I have been pursuing the subject under the most advantageous circumstances for a considerable period. There is no veneer of social polish over this article; it is the genuine thing. You can trust your experiments, — here are the simple chemicals." He leaned back in his chair, looking at Mrs. Sparrow, as to whose understanding the remarks might as well have been uttered in Hebrew, with a gleam of the keenest amusement in his eyes. Then he broke into one of his boisterous laughs. "This is an excellent fricassee, Paula. Have another bit. The second joint, — oh, yes; I insist. It is a veritable chicken, not a fowl in masquerade. He woke me with his crowing yesterday morning."

Angela echoed the merriment with her light tinkle of a laugh, looking up from her plate and showing all her small teeth; and Mrs. Sparrow beamed upon her indulgently, and passed her the seed cookies.

The child was eating with a spontaneous appetite that the hotel fare had failed to stimulate, munching the tender chicken and drinking the foamy milk fresh from the cow that morning.

Paula watched her with the moisture of happiness in her eyes. "Oh, if we were only staying here, John, instead of at the hotel, how quickly Angela

would begin to gain! A cold chop and a slice of burnt toast are all she has for her breakfast; and the milk is not like this, by any means. Do you think you could make room for us? Don't you think you could, Mrs. Sparrow? Angela, would n't you like to come and live at Cousin John's?"

"I mean it seriously," she said, when she was alone with Wilton after dinner. "I was half in jest when I began, to be sure; but really, I think it would be the best possible thing for us both if you would only be so good as to take us. Angela is not gaining as she ought, and I feel sure it is because she does not have proper food. Would it be very dreadful, John, to have three people invade your bachelor establishment?"

Very few persons had ever been able to resist Paula's pleadings. Wilton did not know why he yielded, for such an invasion of his privacy as this would be was something which he would, under ordinary circumstances, have pulled up stakes altogether to avoid. However, Paula got his consent in the end; and her delight was no doubt some compensation to him for the sacrifice.

Their things were brought over from the hotel, and they settled themselves in a couple of large, airy rooms that overlooked the river, or rather the glimpse of it that could be obtained through the trees. It was a little like taking forcible possession, to be sure, and Paula realized that; but she had too much tact to be anything but an agreeable house companion.

She made the parlor habitable by a few touches of feminine taste, and used that for her sitting-room, never intruding upon Wilton in his dusty den unless by special invitation. She had the sheet-iron screen taken away from the fireplace; and a wood-fire crackled there on damp or chilly evenings, — the evenings were mostly cool, however warm the day might have been. She covered some old boxes with chintz, and filled them with great feathery ferns dug in the woods; she dispersed her own rugs and pillows and knickknacks about the room until it began to have an appearance of real refinement.

Wilton, left to seek her society or enjoy his own solitude unmolested, chose to spend most of his evenings in Paula's sitting-room, and the two often sat talking until late into the night. Wilton had lived in the world long enough to know it, and was still, in some degree, of it. His manners were instinctively good; and though Paula could not imagine him in a dress-suit, she would not have been afraid to introduce him to her guests at a dinner. But he belonged to the nonconformist type which her father had represented, not, however, advancing his opinions with her father's gentle persuasiveness, but rather fiercely, with a contemptuous intolerance for those who did not see the truth as he saw it. Upon simple, unpretending ignorance he looked indulgently, finding it, on the whole, picturesque; but for the enlightened mind which failed to follow certain principles to their

logical conclusion, he felt either an amused or an angry disgust, according to his mood.

Yet he was strongly sympathetic where his interest was really awakened, and he had the quality called personal magnetism in a marked degree, which, mingled with Paula's love and admiration for him as a near relative of her father, constituted a powerful attraction for her. She was naturally frank, though not habitually confidential; and she was drawn into many a revelation of herself as they sat talking by the firelight. Many times she felt strongly impelled to tell him her story; but it trembled on her lips for one evening after another before she could gather the courage to speak. At last one day it occurred to her that it might be related in the third person; and that night, Wilton listening attentively with his brows drawn together in their habitual frown, she poured out the story, telling almost every detail as it had taken place, only suppressing the names. Wilton was looking into the fire when she finished; and as he did not immediately speak, she challenged his comment with a questioning "Well?"

He gave her one of his quick, keen looks, penetrating rather than inquiring. "It is your own story, of course," he said.

"How did you know?" she stammered. She felt the futility of denial.

"It does not require a very perspicuous mind," Wilton replied dryly. "You wish my opinion? I am afraid you will be disgusted with me when I

tell you that personally I long ago became bored to death with the sort of experience you describe. But if it seems worth while to you, you have the right to it as an individual. Nobody can stop you if you choose to take what is yours. Of course the great majority of persons have been educated into believing that human law is a direct expression of divine authority. They will howl at you and call you names; but if you can bring yourself to ignore them, there is not the slightest reason why you should not consult your own wishes in this or any other matter."

Here were her father's sentiments as she remembered them, called forth by her own case and bearing directly upon it. Paula sat looking thoughtfully into the fire, without making any reply.

CHAPTER XI

COUSINS

ANGELA gained rapidly. Dressed in loose gingham frocks, she passed the long summer days close to the great healer and restorer, Earth. Her skin grew brown, and her eyes clear and healthy. Paula watched her in a content that would have been perfect had it not been for the unsatisfied longing that constantly stirred in her heart and refused to let her rest. But strangely enough, Wilton's verdict upon the case had not led her any further toward definite action; instead of that she had swung a little to the other side, as one is apt to do when strenuously advised. She had even begun to ask herself if the sort of love she felt for Hagar was in itself permanent; the horror of irrevocably committing herself to a false step drew her back when she was inclined to advance with Wilton's arguments.

Even in the life of the most erratic and irresponsible of farmers there is not much leisure, and Wilton and Paula were together but little except during the evenings. But these were long; for Paula felt it to be the deliberate rejection of a rare privilege to shut her eyes upon the beautiful moonlight nights when the river gleamed like silver and the mountains rose black and grand about them, or to forego the

fireside talks they enjoyed in the cool evenings that would so soon be over.

She was becoming much attached to Wilton, with a fondness that partook partly of the filial and partly of the fraternal; and true to the childlike, impulsive generosity of her nature, she gave him freely of her society and herself. It was, perhaps, when they were both in the humor to discuss abstract questions lightly, that they enjoyed each other most; but Paula never failed in responsiveness, and the man's misanthropic moods won from her a most satisfying sympathy. Although she still regarded his opinions as valuable and to a great degree authoritative, Paula found that when it came to the more personal relations, their positions were reversed, and Wilton became the dependent one, while she assumed an indulgent and maternal tenderness which is a large part of every woman's feeling for every man with whom she comes into close relationship.

It pleased her to know that she could be of the smallest comfort to him, that she had anything to give which he needed. He was so closely identified with her father in her childhood memories and resembled him so nearly in external appearance, that she sometimes felt almost as if she were walking and talking with her father in very fact. Still, when she came to regard him critically away from his presence, she realized that he possessed certain qualities peculiarly his own; and in spite of the fact that they had discussed social and moral questions with a freedom that belongs alone to the

scientific point of view, a certain constraint would sometimes creep in most unaccountably to Paula, and breathe a strange chill upon their pleasant intercourse. Almost any change in mood was, however, to be expected of Wilton; and she accounted for all his irregularities of humor on the large hypothesis that it was his "way" to be capricious and changeable. And so the weeks went by.

They were sitting one night at a late supper, Wilton having been away from home during the day and detained until long past the usual hour for the evening meal. Angela was in bed and asleep; Nora and Mrs. Sparrow had gone to the nearest neighbor's, a quarter of a mile distant. Paula, not having been hungry at supper-time, had waited for Wilton, and they were now alone at the table.

The usual subject, the entire freedom of the individual under all circumstances, had come up for discussion.

"Look at those strawberries," the man was saying. "They appear to the rude human eye to be of the same general shape; yet if they were magnified, say to a hundred times their present dimensions, they would be found to differ greatly in their proportions. In fact, there would be no two exactly alike, and nothing in Nature precisely duplicates another. I am not a literal copy of William Swan, for instance," with a glance through the window at the man who was slouching across the yard with a brimming pail of milk in each hand, "nor are you the counterpart of any other woman living. We

conform to certain general laws of material being; but when it comes to thought, feeling, and action, how can we all be expected to be governed by any given law, especially one made by the majority, which is always an unintelligent factor? I tell you, little Paula, every individual is a law unto himself. Nothing is clearer than that. You can see it, or you would not be your father's daughter."

"I am my father's daughter," said Paula, proudly. She leaned her elbows on the table, dropping her chin into the palms of her hands, and looked across at Wilton. "Do you think I am the least bit like him?" she asked wistfully.

He regarded her deliberately, as if he had never seen her before, taking a generous bite out of his bread-and-butter meanwhile; then he smiled slightly, as if to some other self.

"Well, what do you mean by that?" demanded Paula, somewhat imperiously. "I am hopelessly inferior to him, — don't imagine I think otherwise. You may say so; I shall not take offence. I am willing to be a humble footstool before his throne."

At this Wilton laughed outright. "Why, John, you are positively rude!" She spoke in the same tone in which one would reprove a child.

"I cannot help it if the idea of Paula being a footstool for anybody's throne strikes me as highly humorous," Wilton declared, throwing himself back in his chair. "If you do not wish me to laugh, you must not be so amusing, my little cousin."

"But no one ever treats me in this way." Paula's

face was flushed a little, though her eyes were half laughing through their vexation. "I don't know what you mean."

"Forgive me," he said, sobering at once. "I really mean to be good; only now and then the devil in me gets the upper hand. Make allowance for my life, Paula; remember I have no legitimate outlet for the mischief that works in all of us. I feel as plainly as you can see that I am queer, and growing queerer every day. It is common talk among the good people of this place that I am one of his Satanic Majesty's unaccountables. When my men make a blunder, they never can tell whether I will laugh or swear at them. I can't tell myself half a minute beforehand." He smote the table with his fist, and everything on it quivered. "God! I was made for better things than these," he said.

Paula's eyes rested softly and pityingly upon him; a sort of tender mist suffused them. "I am out of joint with life," Wilton cried between his shut teeth. "I had better have been strangled in my cradle. There," he added with an abrupt change of tone, "I am distressing you. I won't do it any more. Give me some more strawberries, little Paula."

The next day was rainy, and they were kept within doors. Angela and Nora were making molasses candy in the big, roomy kitchen; and Paula was writing letters before the fire in her sitting-room, when Wilton knocked at the door with a tiny yellow kitten in his arm.

"I thought you might like to comfort this little orphan. Her mother has just been despatched to the Happy Hunting Grounds, where I hope she finds herself in a paradise of mice."

"I am afraid it would be anything but paradise for the mice," replied Paula. "Come in, Cousin John." She shut the door after him, and taking the kitten in her arms, went back to the fire, where she sat down upon a low seat, and made a nest in her lap for the little creature, which settled itself there comfortably, purring gratitude. Wilton threw himself into a chair by the table, fingering a pencil that lay upon it in his nervous, restless way. Paula was stroking the kitten, and he watched her hand as it went to and fro over the thick, soft, tawny fur.

"I did not answer your question last night," he said at length.

"No," Paula responded.

"You were not angry with me?"

She laughed. "I am not sure that I was not, — a little. But I got over it very quickly. One soon learns to take you for granted, Cousin John. You are a law unto yourself."

"You are a little tease," he said.

She laughed again. The rain was streaming down the panes, blurring the distorted glass until nothing outside was visible in its original outlines.

"Fancy ourselves in a hotel this morning!" Paula cried, clasping her knees with her hands, while the kitten blinked up in her face, working its claws in an ecstasy of content, "cooped up in two small

rooms, shivering and dreary, wishing ourselves in a city garret, if that were the only alternative. How good it was of you to let us come here!"

"Yes, it was awfully good of me. I only hope I shall not regret it."

"Now I do not know what you mean," she pouted, making a little frown between her brows.

"I mean exactly what I say."

"Well, then, I am sure I hope you will not regret it. If you have not already, it is safe to say you will not, I think. I am on my very best behavior, it is true, and so not wholly myself; but I will try to sustain the rôle."

"And little Paula at her best," said Wilton, slowly, looking not at her but into the fire, "is a person who will leave an aching void behind her when she goes away. If you had not come into my life, I should not have been compelled to miss you when you are gone."

"Then I am not an unmitigated nuisance," she laughed, rising instinctively to her feet. The yellow kitten rolled to the floor, and picked itself up with an air of mild surprise, not being used to drawing-room manners.

Paula pretended to yawn, and said she believed she would go and see how the candy was coming on; but she did not go. A certain oppressive silence pervaded the room, in which the soft soprano purring of the kitten was faintly audible. The rustle of her own garments as she moved about reminded Paula of the stealthy, subdued movements of people at a

funeral. She walked to the window, and stood there a moment trying to look out; falling in this, she came forward to the table again, and began putting together her writing-materials. She folded her letters, put them into their envelopes, and sealed them, recklessly sticking on the stamps cornerwise, and thumping each one down with a blow of her small, rounded fist. Still Wilton sat silent.

At last she walked round and placed herself in front of him, with one hand resting on the high, narrow mantelpiece and her foot planted on the fender. Her chin was lifted with an air of resolve and defiance; her mouth had taken a little aggressive twist at one corner. If Cousin John was determined to be hateful, she would be a match for him.

"How silly we are, disputing and quarrelling as if we were children or lovers instead of cousins! Come, do let us settle that momentous question, and then we can dismiss it. I have asked you once, and of course as a woman I mean to have an answer. Am I or am I not like my father, Mr. John Wilton?"

A sort of dull flush overspread his face, and a vein in the middle of his forehead swelled up darkly.

"I can tell you one thing," he said abruptly, lifting his bright, quick eyes to her face. "If you think you are in love with that painter of yours, you are much mistaken."

CHAPTER XII

SUMMER'S OVER

THE summer was slipping away by no means slowly, and Angela's health was so fully restored that there would be no reason for their remaining beyond the time originally appointed for their return. Ferris was staying at a seashore hotel a short distance from the city. By the tone of his letters Paula could divine that he was lonely. She felt guilty when she thought how selfishly she had enjoyed the summer. She knew that at a word from her Ferris would have come to them. She had not said the word; yet there was something in her heart that was almost like a longing to see him.

She had been for the past few weeks living intensely and almost entirely in the present. There had been days when she had hardly thought of Hagar; in fact, once when a letter had come from him she had slipped it into her pocket, and had not been recalled to its existence until the following morning. She knew that once she could not have rested till she had devoured every word of it, but while she recognized the anomaly she did not stop to reason it out. Now, on receipt of another missive, filled with protestations of love and upbraiding her for her long silence, she felt a well-defined

sense of distaste and of anger that he should dare call her to account.

She believed, from certain internal evidence gathered from her correspondence, that Grace Maury had been going to the studio quite regularly for sittings. She knew what Grace was capable of, and she knew also that Hagar was not likely to drive her away during the dull months when almost every attractive woman was out of town. She could imagine the girl bursting into the studio, and dropping into a chair in one of her pretty, artless attitudes, declaring she could not stop a minute, and staying all the forenoon; and she could see the luminous smile in the young painter's eyes as he worked and listened, with now and then a word of comment. She wondered if he would invite his sitter to a lunch of wafers and olives, and if she would occupy the big easy-chair while she ate. Her small feet would not touch the floor; she would look like a little child, with the artless expression she could put on so effectively when she chose. She would have for Hagar all the charm of freshness and of her own originality beside. If a man happens to be pleased with a woman, he is not repelled by her egotism.

Paula felt not the least doubt that Grace had long since conceived one of her sudden enthusiasms for Hagar. He was handsome, popular, and fascinating. Grace would not tolerate a plain man if he were ever so brilliant, nor a handsome one if he were a fool. Paula knew them both well enough to be sure that

Hagar was just the one to captivate Grace. The girl had been artful enough to repress an expression of the admiration to which she might have given vent if its object had been some one outside of Paula's acquaintance; but it was easy, judging from what had gone before, to draw conclusions.

These thoughts and divinations gave Paula a certain pain which she could not quite analyze. Once she would have known it as an acute jealousy; for when Paula loved she was satisfied with nothing less in return than she herself gave. But now she was no longer sure of herself. Her own nature seemed to have undergone a certain change which made it impossible for her to apply the old formulas to her feeling and conduct. A truth unrecognized and unfelt is still a truth; and despite the shock it had given her, some note within her being had rung in response to Wilton's bold speech.

She had left him and gone straight to her room, declining Angela's offer of molasses candy. There was simply nothing to be said. Something about John's speeches or his tone of delivery gave them a certain authority not to be gainsaid. Her mind was in a whirl. Loose ends of thought and feeling fluttered as in a searching wind. A few weeks ago she would haughtily have demanded an explanation of his words; now she shrank from hearing anything further on the subject. One stab is as good as a dozen to break a bubble.

But the comparison is inadequate. A woman's love, however light, however mistaken, is not a

bubble to disappear in an instant. It may go at once and completely, but it leaves behind something more than a drop of water to evaporate in the sun. It has roots which strike deep sometimes, and cling or twine in with other roots so closely that they cannot be extricated. It would be for Paula's future to show how deeply the roots of her passion for Hagar had struck down into her nature.

Meanwhile there were ways of accounting for the defalcation of love which she could not, in the nature of things, be expected at once to recognize. Objects seen from a distance assume their true proportions, and it was impossible that Ferris should stand side by side with Hagar in the perspective of his wife's vision and not tower above him in worth, if not in stature. Through a glass, and darkly as yet, Paula was beginning to perceive this.

Again, Wilton's arguments in favor of personal freedom had effected more than a hundred sermons on the other side of the question could have done in proving to Paula that the individual can *not* be a law unto himself; that while we live in communities, and partake of the advantages of so living, we should also recognize and obey certain laws of self-sacrifice which alone can make life tolerable to others. Setting morality aside, there would still remain the sufficient motive of altruism, and the lower one of expediency, which, poor as it may be, is far better than none at all. Away from the glamour of Hagar's immediate presence, Paula's ethical training had begun to assert itself. She

had no right to purchase her own happiness at the expense of her husband's good name and peace of mind, even if it were her happiness and not a mirage, as Wilton had risen up to assert.

With regard to Hagar, however, she knew that he needed a stronger woman than Grace Maury for a life companion, — some one who would inspire him, and urge him on to the conception of higher ideals and the activity of more earnest and thorough work. She felt that she might, under other circumstances, have been something of this to him. She knew that Grace could never be his inspiration in any degree; instead of that, she would be more likely to absorb his interests into her own work, for she was not the sort of woman to sink any fraction of her individuality in marriage. Her passions were brilliant in the light they generated, but lacking in warmth like the first spurt of a parlor match, which burns itself out without imparting to any one the glow of a steady flame. As for Hagar, he was incapable of being stirred to his depths by that type of woman. He would be interested and possibly charmed for a little while; and when he had ceased to enjoy the novelty of the attachment, he would sink into the desuetude of mere marital slavery, and his deterioration both as a man and as an artist would begin.

It had not begun yet, though the possibilities were there. He still had a contempt for the hack work he was obliged to do; but the time would come when he would regard it with an easy tolerance, and would even respect it for the profit it would bring, and he

would begin to care for such good things of life as are purchasable with money. He was capable of taking the sordid view, — in fact, he had more than once prophesied its development in himself; and the fact that he had once despised that aspect of things would make his declension all the more complete when it had once begun.

The slight constraint that marred her intercourse with Wilton had seemed to Paula to grow rather than to diminish. There were days when it was quite imperceptible, when their friendliness was to her altogether complete and satisfactory; but there were other days when a veil seemed to be drawn between them. On these days she missed him as she would have missed an absent friend, so far removed from her she felt him to be. Sometimes she attempted to inquire into his mood, but always without even an approximate success. He withdrew into his shell with the turtle's lack of ceremony, and Paula understood herself to have been virtually dismissed. These vagaries did not in the least tend to estrange her from her newly restored relative; on the contrary, she but felt the more tenderly toward him, as sharing in a greater degree her own loneliness and need of something outside the walls that circumstance builds up about us. She did not hesitate to manifest this feeling so far as Wilton himself seemed to encourage it; and when he would turn and leave her abruptly, as he sometimes did, she made excuses for his apparent discourtesy, and was ready to overlook it when they met again.

When the purple asters began to blossom, Paula knew that the season as it is generally regarded was over. On the whole, although the summer had passed so swiftly and so pleasantly, she felt a strong desire to be at home. Her husband needed her, even if he did not love her as some men love their wives. She was, as Olive had said of herself, the one who stood nearest to him. His letters had had a strain of sadness that she could not comprehend underneath the expression of patient willingness that she should remain away from home as long as it pleased her to do so. She knew he must have a great longing to see Angela, who often spoke of him. Paula came to perceive that she had no right to keep the child away from her father, and she began a preliminary picking up of her things, preparatory to leaving for home.

The nights were now invariably cool, and a wood-fire was always made in Paula's sitting-room soon after sundown. Wilton usually brought the sticks, and prepared the structure for lighting; and as often as not, Paula would kneel on the hearth-rug beside him to watch the first blaze. She would sometimes quarrel with him about the arrangement of the kindling materials, half in fun and half in earnest, declaring that they should be placed at such and such angles to one another, in order to insure the proper amount of draught. Wilton, who in spite of his theories never did anything according to rule, would toss the sticks in as they happened to fall, and enjoyed the triumph of seeing the fire burn

readily, in spite of Paula's prediction that it would go out.

"It is just because the draught happens to be strong in this chimney," she declared one night, as the flames roared up, and Wilton gave her a look of boyish exultation. "You would not get such an unscientific structure to light anywhere else. I would defy you to make a fire in our library grate."

"I should scorn to do it," retorted Wilton, — "a little, mean, despicable attempt at a fireplace. I would as soon have one of those absurd imitations of burning sticks one sees at the theatre, as the paltry blaze you could make in one of those little holes-in-the-wall."

"How detestable you are! We have a lovely fire there every evening. It lights up the whole room. If you will come to Boston this winter, I will show you what kind of a fire I can build."

"I fled from Boston once; I am not likely to return to it very soon. The dearest spot on earth to me now is 'Home, Sweet Home.'"

She turned and gave him a look of severity. "I sometimes think you utterly detest me," she said slowly.

Side by side on their knees, they looked at each other a moment. A sudden intensity of expression, mingled with mockery yet unmistakable in meaning, leaped into the man's eyes. "No, I do not detest you," he said. "Anything but that."

The words were nothing; but the look was neither to be ignored nor laughed away. Paula rose to her

feet. She scarcely knew what she was doing. Her head swam; she groped desperately about in her mind for something to say that should serve however inadequately to cover her confusion; but even if her mind had not refused to act, her tongue was for the moment tied. Wilton, still on one knee, was looking straight into the fire. Although she saw his face only in profile, she could not fail to read the half-humorous, half-desperate expression that curled the corners of his lips and shone in his eyes.

As he rose to his feet and stood facing her, Paula started involuntarily, and grew white about the lips. She did not move from her position on the rug, however, but looked beseechingly into his eyes as if she would implore him to save not only her but himself from the devil that had possession of him.

A strange laugh broke from his lips. "You are not afraid of me, I hope. There is no danger. I am not such a fool as that."

"No, I am not afraid of you," she replied gently, though her voice trembled. "You were my father's cousin, and you are mine. I sat on your knee when I was a little child. I love you as I should have loved you if you had been my own brother; and you love me in the same way."

He laughed again loudly, but without mirth. "Do not be too sure of your conventionalities," he said. "A man is a man before he is a cousin, little Paula."

She grew paler than before, and a sudden contrac-

tion in her throat made her gasp for breath. Her lips parted; she looked at him with eyes that were dilated with horror. "How hideous!" she said in a whisper.

Suddenly she shut her hands tightly and brought them together. "No, no; I cannot have it so!" she cried. "John, don't look at me in that way; it is horrible. Oh, what an ending to our summer, — the summer that has been such a happy one for me! All the time it seems I was doing — this, — adding one more wrong to my list of mistakes and worse than mistakes. This, then, is how an unlawful love looks when one sees it from the outside, — vile, ghastly, hideous. This is the sort of thing I have let into my life, and thought it could stay there and not turn the whole life black as itself. Oh, I see now what people mean when they talk of sin, — the word I have called meaningless. And to think it should be you who have taught me the significance of it, — you whom I loved and trusted, who knew me when I was a baby, — oh, I cannot bear to have it so! I hate myself when I think of it, — I almost hate you too, only I cannot quite do that; for my father's sake I cannot do it. John, speak to me; there is surely something you can say that will make it seem less dreadful. Won't you say it for the sake of the happy hours we have spent together? John — "

She bent forward, looking at him imploringly, at the same time shrinking together as if half afraid of him. He looked back at her for a moment with-

out moving; then for answer to her appeal he suddenly thrust his hands behind his back, and clinched them together there. Paula uttered a low cry, and fled from the room.

He remained standing where she had left him for the space of a few moments; then he turned and began pacing up and down the floor. "God!" he muttered to himself, "what a life this is! And what it might have been!"

All the same, he understood himself too well to believe that even Paula could have made it radically different. At the bottom of the cup satiety was always lurking, to be revealed as soon as he had partly drained it. He had come into life with a curse upon him, and the curse would stay so long as he stayed.

Inside her room, Paula fell back against the door she had just closed behind her. "Oh, Roger, Roger!" she cried, lifting her clasped hands. She never thought of Hagar, but only of the shelter and comfort of her husband's presence, — the presence that of itself means comfort and shelter, and might, if they had been only a little less unfortunate, have meant much more — to him.

She spent the night in packing her trunks for an early departure on the following morning, for she felt that it would be impossible for her to remain under Wilton's roof another day. Angela and Nora must stay a little longer, for there were alterations going on at home, fresh carpets and draperies to be seen to, and a new cook to be engaged; but she herself must go immediately.

Wilton sat in his den below, smoking pipe after pipe of his strongest tobacco, and listening to the sound of Paula's footfalls going to and fro over his head, while the log-fire burned itself out, unwatched, lighting up the pictured summer-houses, the prim ladies in their big bonnets, and the colossal deer that adorned the walls.

So Paula went away, shrinking to the last moment from every familiar sight that had now become as painful by association as it had a few hours ago been pleasant. Wilton drove her to the station, — it could not be avoided, — through the cold autumn mist that lay like frost on the asters, silvered the grass, and dripped from the leaves. He was wrapped in one of his savage, impenetrable moods that reminded Paula of her conception of the inarticulate displeasure of primitive man. He gave her merely a limp handshake at parting; and she saw him drive away at a reckless pace before the train started. The tears dropped slowly down her cheeks under her veil; she was sorry, now they had parted so coldly, that she had not given him a kind word to remember after his excited and bitter mood should have passed.

She had telegraphed to Ferris, and he met her at the Boston station. They could give each other only a conventional greeting; but when they were alone in the library at home, she turned to him with a wistful smile, and met his eyes fixed gravely and searchingly upon her. Both looked a little confused; and Paula said some what shyly, "Are you *glad* to get home, Roger?"

"Are you?" he returned. A smile lit up his dark face, giving it a brilliancy that made it almost handsome. Paula's pulses quickened with a sudden longing to go to him and put her arms about his neck and lay her head on his shoulder, but the habit of constraint was sufficient to hold her back. She had no words to take the place of the action; therefore she hesitated, with her lips parted as if to speak, and the golden moment passed.

A hurt look came into Ferris's face.

"You cannot be quite glad to get back to brick walls," he said, with an attempt at speaking cheerfully; "and of course it is not much like home yet, with the draperies down and the furniture covered."

"It will seem more natural when Angela is here. I was sorry not to bring her for your sake, Roger; but it did not seem best."

"You are very kind. It does seem a long time since I saw her," he replied.

Paula went about the house with a chill at her heart. The partly dismantled rooms wore a cheerless aspect, and her good intentions with regard to Roger had dismally failed. Perhaps they had hardly had a fair trial; but one is easily rebuffed by a repulse that seems only a part of a long coldness.

On his part, Ferris had carefully steeled himself to repress any emotion that might shake him at having Paula under his own roof again. He had succeeded only too well; but he experienced a mistaken sense of satisfaction in having kept down an

exhibition of feeling. Most of us go through life in this blind way, missing some of the most precious things it has to offer us, and wondering why we could not have had them.

The improvements and alterations went on with reasonable swiftness; but the house seemed silent and empty without Angela, and Paula found herself growing more and more impatient for the child's return.

CHAPTER XIII

THE VOICE OF A CHILD

EARLY one forenoon Grace burst in upon her.

"I saw the house was open, and I determined to find out if you were really here. I did not expect to see you, I must say, because I supposed if you had got home you would have let me know at once. How long have you been in town?"

"About a week," Paula said. "I have been very busy. You see what is going on. And you — have you been in Boston all summer? Has n't it been very hot?"

"Yes — no, I don't know that it has, very. I have had loads of invitations to go away. But somehow — well, on the whole, it has been quite cool in the city, I think."

"Have you seen anything of Mr. Hagar?" Paula said, obeying a sudden impulse, without giving herself time to hesitate.

"Oh, yes; quite a little. I go to his studio once a week or so. He is painting me, you know. I have always wanted my portrait done, and he seemed quite willing to do it." She spoke carelessly, — a trifle too carelessly, — and Paula could see that a flush had mounted to her cheek.

"It must be nearly completed, I should think. I have been away almost three months."

"Well, it is," said Grace, with an involuntary sigh. Paula looked at her keenly, and thought she had grown a little thin. There was something in her own heart that was not exactly an ache, but a sensation which corresponded to weariness. She felt as if she would like to shut her eyes and sleep — for years, perhaps.

Angela's picture, heavily framed in carved ivory, hung over the fireplace in the library. If it had formed the only tie that bound Paula to its author, it would indeed have been no weak one. She was a woman in whom the sense of gratitude is deeply rooted and of strong growth. When she looked at the portrait, — Angela's self, it almost seemed, — her heart went out to Hagar. A longing to see him would sweep over her then; but though it seemed for the moment to flood her whole being, it would ebb away again, leaving her strangely indifferent, and it never moved her feet one step in his direction.

She had been at home two weeks, when one evening, as she sat alone in the library, she experienced a singular sensation. She had been thinking of Hagar, wondering when they should meet and where, searching her soul for strength to write to him and ask him to go away for a while, or at least to try not to cross her path until they could meet as mere acquaintances. That he no longer had the power to stir her that he once possessed, she was sure; but how completely he had lost it she could not know

until she was put to the test of meeting him face to face.

The strange thrill swept her from head to foot. For an instant she was so bewildered by it that she lost the sense of sight. As she lifted her eyes half blindly, they seemed of themselves to seek the portrait on the wall above her. The airy figure of the child was all she could distinguish; everything about it swam in a slowly revolving frame of mist, reddened by the firelight.

Involuntarily her hands raised themselves and grasped the arms of her chair; some magnetic influence was drawing her forward. At the same moment the slender figure of the child appeared to leave its frame. With her eyes fixed in a grave smile upon her mother's face, she stepped out upon the billowy cloud that rolled and circled about her. Her loose hair stirred in the breath of her coming; her little hands, with each finger-tip defined in the rosy light, were stretched toward Paula.

"Mamma, mamma!" rang out upon the silence of the room. The sound was not that of a human voice, but sharp and twanging, like the vibration of a tense wire, yet distinct, unmistakable. At the same time something snapped in Paula's brain. She was conscious for one brief instant of an icy chill in her veins; then darkness overtook her.

Hearing returned before sight.

"Do you think I had better try to take her with me, Doctor?" said Ferris's voice. "I have made arrangements for a car and engine to be ready at a

quarter to twelve. The track will be cleared as far as is possible, and there will be very little delay; but the strain upon her nerves — "

"It is a question whether she will be willing to be left behind," replied the doctor. "The strain upon the nerves is greater in suspense than in action sometimes. If she comes out of this in a few moments, and does not faint again when you tell her, I should be inclined to advise taking her. If the accident should turn out to be as serious as we fear, she would probably blame you very much for not having allowed her to go."

Paula opened her eyes upon Ferris's white face. The doctor stood on the other side of the bed chafing her hands. Rose, the housemaid, was going about the room on tiptoe, putting some things into a valise, sniffing audibly, and every now and then lifting a corner of her apron to her eyes.

Paula sat erect. She felt deathly sick; but she shut her lips tightly for a moment, clutching convulsively at her husband's hand. "Tell me, tell me — " she tried to say.

Ferris looked helplessly at the doctor, who came round the bed. "Your little girl has had a fall," he said gently. "She is only slightly hurt, we hope, — a little shaken, of course. Will you trust your husband and me to go and bring her home?"

Paula, who had been staring at him wildly, interrupted him with a shriek. She pushed them both aside and stood up on the floor, putting back her loosened hair.

"Stay here while my child is dying, — my little Angela, my baby, — the only creature in all the world that loves me? How dare you ask such a thing of me, — her mother? All I have, — all I ever had, — my baby, my own baby! Oh, why did I ever leave her? Give me my gown," she cried, turning to the petrified maid. "No, not the black one, — should I go to her in black? — the blue one there on the chair. Quick, quick, make haste, for Heaven's sake. My baby, my little Angela, — oh, God, do not let her die! She is all I have; why did I leave her, — how could I, how could I? Heaven have mercy, I cannot lose her — Roger, I cannot lose her. Hold me, — no, do not touch me. How can you stand there, Roger, while she is dying? See, I am ready; come, we must not lose any time. You cannot love her as I do; if you did, you could not stand there so calmly. Oh, Heaven have mercy on us both!"

"Paula," said Ferris, sternly, grasping his wife's arm, "be silent. If you do not become quiet at once, you will not be allowed to go with us. If you should come into her presence in this state, you might destroy what little chance of life she has. As it is, only God can save her."

"He must save her; He must." The wild despair in her eyes had turned to a dull agony. They were alone in the room, and she reached out her hands to him with a gesture of abandonment. "You never cared for me, Roger; but you will have to care for me now. I cannot bear it alone. Take me in your arms; hold me close. Forgive me for what I said.

I know you love her, — my baby, my own darling baby!"

It was a strange journey, that of the three persons alone with the conductor in the single car that sped through the darkness toward where Angela lay, living or lifeless they did not know. The car swayed from side to side, and Paula sat looking straight before her, with Ferris close beside her holding her hand. She did not once open her lips to speak, and when they spoke to her, only shook her head. The landscape lay black on either side; even the smaller stations were dark, and the only light outside was the occasional lurid reflection of the fire on the smoke of the engine.

It was near daylight when they reached their stopping-place. There they were met by a neighbor of Wilton's, who drove them to the house. Wilton opened the door as they drove up. Angela was out of danger, the local doctor believed. A faint smell of ether pervaded the house.

Paula was divested of her outer garments and led upstairs, almost unaware of what was being done with her. Angela lay upon the high-posted bed, looking like a waxen child against the white pillows. Her bandaged arm was lying across her breast; her eyes were open, and her brows drawn together in a little frown, as her gaze anxiously sought the door. As her mother appeared, a smile of utter happiness came over her face.

"Oh, it *was* you, mamma. I thought you would come. I called you and called you."

She had slipped from the haymow and fallen to the floor below, breaking one arm and bruising her little body. For the two hours during which she had lain unconscious, Wilton had not ceased to work over her. He would allow no assistance, and hardly spoke, but went over and over the delicate limbs, calling back the ebbing life, until at last there came a small, fluttering sigh, and they knew she had not forever ceased to breathe. Even then he did not relax his efforts. While the doctor was setting her arm, he sat beside her holding the sponge that contained the ether; and his face was the first she saw when her eyes unclosed after the operation was over.

After that she would not let him leave the room, but clung to his hand with her little, tremulous fingers; and when she wished to be moved, it was Wilton and not Nora who must perform the service. Mrs. Sparrow, dissolved in tears, declared to Paula that Wilton had saved the child's life, and the mother was willing to leave it in that way. Even the doctor confessed that the rubbing had probably favored circulation until his arrival with the usual restoratives, — there was not so much as a drop of brandy in Wilton's cupboard.

They remained nearly two weeks, when it was considered prudent for Angela to be taken home. During their stay Wilton had been, at least on the surface, as mildly agreeable as the most commonplace of men; but when they began to make preparations for going away, he showed himself in a less

engaging light. He relapsed into one of his taciturn moods, from which he seemed to make no effort to rouse himself. Paula had had no opportunity for even a word alone with him. She had scarcely left Angela's room during the day, and never at night. She had hoped that Wilton and Ferris would derive some degree of pleasure from each other's society; but that could only come about by an especial effort on Wilton's part, which thus far he had not chosen to put forth.

There could be very little in common between two men who took such entirely different views of life. To the one existence was a burden to be borne until it became intolerable, and then cast off as one would discard an old garment; to the other it was an opportunity for work, the means of a man's development. Ferris listened in a courteously suppressed contempt to Wilton's exposition of his theories of life; and the latter thought of him only as the exponent of effete traditions that should long since have been outgrown by the thinking portion of the human race.

The day before they were to leave for home, Paula, having wandered downstairs a few moments while Angela was sleeping, found Wilton's door ajar. He was stretched out on the sofa with his feet elevated, making a cloud of smoke about his head that partly concealed his features.

"I don't think you have been very kind to me, Cousin John," said Paula, pushing the door open a little way, and standing on the threshold. "You

have hardly spoken to me this week; do you know that?"

He made a slight concession to good manners by lowering his feet from the arm of the sofa to the level of his shoulders.

"Has it mattered very much to you, — affected your happiness very deeply?" This he asked with a faint smile under his mustache.

"Yes, it has. I am very fond of you, John. I was very happy here this summer."

"And you will be just as happy away from here. Oh, that 's the way of the world, Paula. You stand there and talk to me in your gentle way, with your eyes shining into mine, and you make me long to take you in my arms and carry you away to the ends of the earth to a desert cave, where I might have you for my own forever; but, good God! don't I know that you will stand in a dozen other places, and talk to a dozen other men with your sweet voice and your shining eyes, and that some of them will be wild with love for you, and some will not care much, and it will be all the same to you whether they are simply indifferent or whether they go mad. That 's the way with you soft, kittenish women; you go through the world breaking men's hearts, never looking right nor left; and if one of them happens to cry out, you open your eyes in surprise, as if you had never guessed you were charming. God! I 've tasted something of hell in these past few weeks; I am not likely to bear it much longer. Some day you will take up a newspaper and learn

that I have 'flung the dust aside,' to quote one of your favorites. It will not take me long to do it when I have made up my mind."

"I think perhaps it would be the best thing you could do," said Paula, thoughtfully.

"Good! There spoke your father's daughter. I shall surely take your advice, — sooner or later."

"I am not advising you. I should not presume to that extent. But I think if you cannot at least make life endurable to those about you, it would be as well to be out of it yourself."

He looked at her with the old mocking gleam in his eyes.

"You are handsome when you draw yourself up and curl your lip in that scornful way." He raised himself to a sitting posture, leaning one elbow on the arm of the sofa, and resting his head on his hand. "Let me tell you, Paula, you think you have loved that painter of yours, but you have not. Some day you will meet the man whom you can love, and then the soul will come into those beautiful eyes. I should like to be here then, but I shall not be. It would be something to see."

She turned her head aside; her lip trembled a little. "To think you should talk so to me, — just now, when I am going away. We may never meet again."

"That is a lovely curve where the cheek melts into the throat. You have a beautful chin, so rounded and tender. The man who calls your soul into life will love that little chin, Cousin Paula."

She let her eyes dwell on him thoughtfully a moment; a warm light crept into them. "I love my husband," she said, almost in a whisper; "at least, I think so."

He burst into a roar of scornful laughter. "That prig? Good heavens, no; you mistake yourself. You are wrong, Paula; your soul is not yet awakened. It never will be by him, — a man who lives by law in every sense of the word; a man bound to the conventions, incapable of love himself — "

"Stop!" said Paula, imperatively. "I will not listen to another word against him. You to speak in such terms of him, — you who are not fit that he should come under your roof! I do love him; and if he does not love me, it is because I am too unworthy of him." She took a step forward. "John, do not let us quarrel the last time we shall speak alone together, perhaps. But I want you to know that, whether he ever loves me or not, he is the one man in the world for me from this time forth, — a man for any woman to be proud of. You have seen what he has been to me in these days of anxiety, so tender, so considerate, — everything but loving. I shall try my best to make him love me, — and sometime, perhaps, I shall succeed."

Wilton had been listening with his eyes on the carpet, and a satirical smile playing about his lips. "I wish you success with all my heart, Cousin Paula," he said, in a tone ironically courteous. "But I am afraid that with such material you are too likely to fail."

She stooped a little, and looked through the window. She had caught a glimpse of her husband's figure coming down the road toward the house. She turned quickly and slipped through the doorway, and ran down the walk. As Ferris drew near, she opened the gate and held it back for him to enter. There was a strange, unwonted shyness that was almost coquetry, in the droop of her head; she looked askance at Roger as he approached. He gave her a quick, questioning glance, and their eyes met for a moment, in a look different from any they had ever exchanged before. There was an instant of hesitation that suddenly inexplicably turned to the old constraint. With a word or two of formal acknowledgment, Ferris passed up the path, and his wife followed him.

Against her will she glanced in at the half-open door of Wilton's room, when she re-entered the hall. He was standing before the empty fireplace, with his hands behind him and his pipe in his mouth. As their eyes met, his said, "Ah! was I right or not, Cousin Paula?" and hers, "Yes, you were right. He does not love me; he never will."

CHAPTER XIV

ONE LITTLE KISS

Society's wheels were oiled and running again, — oiled with money, and revolving under the high pressure of a universal desire for pleasure. Paula and Hagar had met twice, shaken hands, exchanged a few commonplace words, and separated as mere acquaintances. They had not once looked straight into each other's eyes. There was a day of reckoning to come; for in spite of Paula's suspicions regarding Grace, she could not believe that Hagar had really transferred his allegiance from herself to another.

They met for the third time at Mrs. Garrowell's. The affair was a musical; and although conversation is never stagnant on such occasions, Paula made the music an excuse for keeping silent. Hagar had placed himself beside her; every now and then he spoke a few low words at her ear. Paula's fair, regular profile was all he saw of her face; he could read nothing from her expression, which was neutral and composed.

"Won't you look at me, dearest?" he murmured, stooping to pick up her fan, which had slipped to the floor. "Well, no matter; it is enough to be near you."

And again, under cover of the music, —

"Paula, please give me one word. I am trying to be patient; I will be patient. But it is hard, darling; it would be much easier if you would only be kind."

Still she kept her face averted.

When the music was over, she turned away to speak to some friends. She lost sight of him for a time, but a little later in the hall she came unexpectedly upon Grace. The young lady was not a guest evidently. She wore the dark red jacket trimmed with fur; her black eyes gleamed not quite amiably under the brim of her hat. She held her note-book in her hand, and was writing rapidly. Hagar stood beside her, and Mrs. Garrowell was just moving majestically away from them, with the remnant of a gracious smile upon her lips.

"Oh, she treats me well as a reporter," Miss Maury was saying, with a vicious little expression playing about her mouth. "They all do; if they did n't — " The familiar snap of the elastic band over the closed note-book completed the sentence. "I had an invitation to come, you know, like the rest of you personages, only I don't accept that kind. I knew what was expected, — a long notice in the Sunday paper."

"How do you do, Grace?" said Paula, putting out her hand.

Grace looked up as if a little startled, and the ready color flew into her cheeks.

"How is the portrait coming on, Mr. Hagar?"

went on Mrs. Ferris, composedly. "I hear it has made rapid progress this summer. I shall expect to see it at some of the exhibitions. It is sure to attract attention."

There was an angry sparkle in Hagar's blue eyes. This persistent ignoring of their former relations was of the sort that proves maddening to a man.

"The portrait is at the studio," he said curtly.

"Yes?" she responded indifferently.

Hagar turned abruptly, and spoke a few words to the young reporter, who answered him as briefly, with a swift glance upward at his face. He turned on his heel, passing Paula without a word. A few seconds later he reappeared, with his overcoat on and his hat in his hand. Grace bade Mrs. Ferris a rather conscious good-night, and the two went out together.

There were tears on Paula's pillow that night. When one is struggling in the wrong path, that of duty looks as if it would at least be straight and easy to travel, if ever so barren. The plan of forgetting Hagar and letting him drop out of her life, of giving herself to the fulfilling of her daily obligations to husband and child, still commended itself to her as a distinct relief from the elaborate system of acting required so long as she allowed herself to hold any sort of clandestine relations with him.

But after all, it was not so simple to let him go. Even if he consented to release her from her promise, it would not be easy. One cannot forget by the mere effort of will. The rose-scent lingers about

the fragments of the vase; and one can find no better simile than that for the tenacious memory of a woman who has once loved. Perhaps no one could ever be to Paula just what Hagar had been, and might have continued to be had circumstances been different. Out of the experiences of a lifetime, there must be one that remains supreme; and this would probably leave its roots in her heart, though the stem was broken and the blossoms stripped from their branches.

Ferris had been going out with his wife more of late than had been his regular custom. Paula seemed to wish it, and that was reason enough for his making the sacrifice. Any sort of social coruscation was as wearisome to him as a display of fireworks, and easily comparable to that, — all flash and splutter, and nothing left when it was over. He encouraged her making parties, because she appeared happier when her mind was directed to some special purpose; and he always assisted her in receiving and entertaining her guests, though after a day at the office or in court he was weary enough to think rather longingly of the quiet and seclusion of his study.

To Paula there was a certain sense of safety and protection in his presence; she had come to depend on him for moral support. For this reason she always wished him to be where she could speak to him, or at least look at him; and she felt a vague sense of uneasiness when he was not within sight or hearing.

Missing him during one of her own small and select parties, a foolish yet uncontrollable panic took possession of her. She looked hastily through the rooms, and saw that her guests were all apparently amusing themselves, and then ran upstairs, as she often did in the course of an evening, to see if Angela were properly covered and sleeping soundly. As she bent over the small bed, her foot struck some object on the floor, and stooping, she picked up Ferris's pencil. He, too, had been to look at the child.

She stood rolling the pencil thoughtfully in her fingers. Perhaps he had gone to his study for a few moments' quiet; she wondered if that were the case. She stole a little way up the stairs, and saw that a light was shining under his door. It might be he was tired or ill; if he were, she should like to speak to him. She moved irresolutely a step or two farther up the staircase; he must have heard the rustle of her dress, for he opened his door immediately. "Oh, it is you, Paula?" he said, in evident surprise. "Did you want me?"

She held out the pencil. "Is this yours?" she faltered. "I found it in Angela's room." The light from the open door shone on her pliant figure in its loose, straight draperies, and on the small head with its ruffled hair, and the grave, wistful face. Ferris shut the door and came toward her. They went downstairs together, Paula a step in advance.

At the foot of the first flight, opposite Angela's door, he gently detained her. As she looked up at

him somewhat wonderingly, his arm went round her waist. Her face was lifted, not a word was spoken; but he slowly bent his lips to hers.

A strange sensation thrilled through Paula's veins; she leaned against the wall, and silently motioned him to go down. He went, like a man in a dream, and left her standing there.

They met next morning like a pair of unacknowledged lovers. Fortunately, Angela woke early, and breakfasted with her father and mother, forming a convenient third person at what would otherwise have been an embarrassing occasion. It had been years since the two had given each other any kiss except the formal one that mere acquaintances may exchange; no wonder, therefore, that the incident of the evening before had assumed the proportions of an event in their minds.

Olive had been in the country all summer, and had only just returned to the city. There had been rumors that Goring's business firm was badly involved, and Paula was anxious about her friend. At the first opportunity she hurried over to see her, and found her sitting alone in the middle of the large parlor. She was in morning dress, and her hair was carelessly arranged; her hands lay in her lap. The room wore the dreary look of one that has been long shut up; and Paula felt a sense of depression creep like a chill wind through the mist of her own dawning happiness.

Olive returned her greeting listlessly; she was never effusive, but now she appeared actually be-

numbed. "Why, Olive, what is it?" said Paula, in deep concern. "Has anything happened?" She suddenly thought of the reports she had heard, and took the other's hand in her own with a sympathetic pressure.

But Olive drew it away, and seemed to rouse herself. "Come upstairs, where we shall not be interrupted. I want to hear all about your summer. Have you had a good time? Is Angela better? I suppose she has grown so I should hardly know her."

The shabbiness of the sitting-room contrasted strangely with the elegance of the parlor. Only Paula of all Mrs. Goring's acquaintance had ever been allowed to witness that unveiling of the skeleton. The threadbare carpet and worn furniture, with the white linings peeping through the ragged upholstery, were all familiar to her; yet they impressed her with a new dreariness this gray November morning.

Olive ran on rapidly from one subject to another, talking of everything but herself; but at last Paula said, —

"There is something the matter, Olive, something new. I can see it in your face. Please tell me what it is. Perhaps I can do something to help."

"Oh, no; you cannot. There is nothing to do. Perhaps you have heard that Horace's firm has failed? There is nothing left. We have got to give up this house; I signed the papers yesterday, or the sheriff would be here to-day. Don't talk to me; I can't bear it. And please don't try to help

me in any way. I would rather do it all alone; it will occupy my mind."

It was hard to go away without a word of sympathy or an offer of help; but Paula knew her friend well enough to be sure that she had spoken as she felt. It was her way of bearing things to creep away like a wounded animal, out of sight of any of her kind. Paula longed to tell her husband the story. He was so strong and possessed so many resources, he would surely know some way of escape from the worst of Olive's difficulties. But Ferris was out of town, and would not be at home till late that night.

She ate her dinner alone, and afterward wandered into the parlor and sat down at the piano. She played for a long time soft, dreamy things, — bits of Chopin and Schumann and Mendelssohn, letting her fingers fall upon the keys every now and then, and her thoughts drift vaguely into the sort of future young maidens dream of. All at once she struck into a sweeping, triumphal march, with a majestic movement like the victorious return from battle. The crashing chords followed one another so closely that she did not hear the ripple of the electric bell, nor perceive that any one had entered the room, until a dark figure came between her vision and the filmy white of the window draperies.

She stopped abruptly in her playing, and rose slowly, her hand resting on the back of her chair, and the folds of her long, clinging house gown lying about her feet.

"Oh, Mr. Hagar — " she said.

"Good evening, Mrs. Ferris," he returned.

She motioned him to a chair, and he sat down, Paula placing herself opposite to him at some little distance away.

They made an attempt at talking commonplaces; at least, Paula did, and he humored her for a while, returning answers that were mostly bitter or cynical or sarcastic. He had very little to tell, he said. She knew how he had passed the summer, in a stuffy studio, working for his daily bread and cheese, with a little wine and cake thrown in. He had done some decent things, he supposed; they would be on exhibition at one of the galleries by and by perhaps, if he chose to take the trouble. The inane society belles and beauties were beginning to haunt the studio, with their bangs and their wasp waists and their ridiculous sleeves, — if a woman had a beautiful line in her body, she always managed to disguise it. The winter would be like the summer, he supposed, unless — He stopped short and looked at her.

"I wonder you do not go abroad," Paula said, in her clear, incisive tones. "If you are tired of your work, it might be a good thing for you to see new types. It might, perhaps, furnish you with the inspiration you lack here."

He remained silent, looking at her from under his brows. Something in his look reminded her of Wilton. She thought of her husband, and realized anew what his presence meant to her.

"I should think a portrait-painter more than any one else would be in danger of getting into ruts," she went on a little hurriedly. "It seems to me a change of faces would be very desirable to him. We have a good many types in America, it is true, but we are all more or less alike."

"There is only one face in the world to me," Hagar said below his breath.

"Grace Maury's?" The moment Paula had spoken she regretted what she had said. That sort of playfulness was equally out of place whether he took it in jest or in earnest. He took it as his type of man is apt to take such speeches,— as a direct tribute to himself. The sunny smile broke over his face.

"Did you care about that? Is that why you have been playing the cold and distant little lady? Is that the reason, Paula — darling?" His face was alight; he looked handsomer than she had ever seen him, and it would be absurd to say that she was absolutely unmoved. But with the old danger came a new desire to be saved from it. She looked quietly into his eyes.

He was standing before her. "Were you really jealous, dearest? — of that little black-eyed girl with the tongue hung in the middle? The idea of it! But I have guessed right, have I not, Paula?"

"No," said Paula, rising and slipping past him, "you have not. I am not jealous. I have no reason — or rather, no occasion — to be so."

He turned where he stood, and looked at her in

amazement. "Well, you have changed," he said, with brutal frankness.

"Yes; I have changed."

"What do you mean, Paula?" he said. "For God's sake, do not let us play with each other any longer."

"That is what I wish, — not to play any longer."

He came slowly toward her, a dull amazement in his face. "You wish — not to play? Have you been playing at love all this time? By Heaven, you have done it extremely well. You quite deceived me; I think you very nearly deceived yourself."

Her eyelids quivered, but she returned his look steadily. "Yes, so I did."

"Do you mean me to understand that you no longer care for me?"

"I suppose I do."

His face turned an ashen gray. "You fling me off, then; you are done with me? You have let me kiss you, hold you in my arms, call you every endearing name. You promised, if I remember rightly, to go away with me. Matters could hardly have gone further without furnishing material for the newspapers. It looked like love; if it was not that, then I do not know love by sight. I am afraid you will have to explain still further. I am very dull, I suppose; but I do not understand. Please be as explicit as you can."

"I do not quite understand, myself," she repeated slowly.

Her hands were behind her, resting on the cush-

ioned back of a chair against which she leaned. She was looking off over his shoulder into a distance he could not fathom. A soft light shone in her eyes; there were tender curves about her mouth where it melted into the cheek. No lines were chiselled there as yet; when they came they would only accentuate the sweetness.

"There is some one else," said Hagar, in a low tone.

The dreamy look gradually melted into a smile, her eyes detached themselves from the vision they had been contemplating and rested on his face. His own eyes burned like two dull coals of fire; his lips were set, — his whole countenance had grown hard with repressed feeling. He waited breathlessly for her to speak.

"Yes," said Paula, "my husband."

A silence fell between them. The expression of Hagar's face had changed to one of dull stupefaction. He did not look at her, but let his gaze wander about the room like that of a demented person, who sees, but unintelligently.

"In that case I had better go," he said at last.

If he had broken out into reproaches, she would have answered him blow for blow. The instinct of the lioness was prepared for an instant awakening. But his unexpected submission touched her. As he turned stupidly away, she came forward and placed herself before him.

"Do not go this way. I have not forgotten that I loved you once; perhaps I never shall forget. It

may be I gave you something I shall never give to any other man," she said, feeling by some prophetic instinct the truth which most women learn only by the revelation of experience. "But I have changed, not to you alone, but wholly, completely. I am not the woman I was six months ago. I do not fully understand the change myself, and I could not explain it to you. Something has come into my life, — a new quality, — I hardly know what to call it. I think it corresponds to what people used to call experiencing religion; at any rate, I am sure that it has altered the current of my life to such a degree that I can never be the same again. I see things from a different point of view. I see now that two persons have no right to take their own happiness into their hands, regardless of what it may bring to others, and that even happiness itself is not the only thing to be desired. I felt this vaguely before, but now I see it as plainly as if a veil had been drawn away between me and the truth. Still, I was not sure of myself until — the other night. Something happened then that told me all the rest, — all I was not sure of. I do not deserve to be happy, but I am." She hesitated a moment. "I wish you might be as happy," she added.

She felt an infinite pity for him, — this great, strong man, whom she had such power to hurt. He threw back his head with a short, bitter laugh. "I am so likely to be happy. I have not had any revelation; the heavens have not opened to me. I have got to learn the lesson in the regular way."

"There are other things to live for besides happiness," repeated Paula.

"That is a very useful thing to know. I shall expect to derive great comfort from that fact." He turned to her abruptly. "Good-by; I am going to relieve you of my presence."

"Oh, do not leave me in this way!" she cried. The tears had welled to her eyes. We are strange combinations of cruelty and tenderness. A few moments ago she would not have hesitated to hurt him; now that he was at her mercy she felt a piercing compassion for him. She walked up to him and put one hand on his shoulder, drawing his head down and pressing a kiss on his forehead. It was such a kiss as she might have given Angela, but it revived his stunned sensibilities. He caught her in his arms, held her close, and kissed her again and again. Then he almost pushed her from him, and went out into the hall.

Paula followed him, the tears flowing down her cheeks. He was groping blindly for his coat and hat. She lifted the heavy ulster in both hands, and held it up for him to put it on. When she saw his face again, it had hardened. He looked down at her with a savage, resolute expression that filled her with a sudden terrifying apprehension.

"Good-night," he said curtly. Then he opened the door and went out, letting it fall behind him with a heavy clang that echoed through the house.

Paula walked up and down the parlor, trying to stifle the vague fears that were surging in her mind.

In that desperate mood men had gone to their death; and not yet could she bring herself to view his fate with indifference. A little later a telegram came from Ferris saying that he was detained, and should not be at home until the next night. She went to bed early, but she could not sleep. Hagar's face floated before her, and its look of dogged desperation kept her forebodings awake. He had made no threats; but he had looked at that last moment like a man who has taken some sudden resolution. To be sure, she no longer loved him; but a woman can never quite forget the man whom she has once regarded with especial tenderness — until he belongs to another woman.

She could not spend the next day at home alone, and, having nothing in particular to do, she ventured to violate Olive's injunction, and go to her, as was her custom in any strait or stress of feeling.

Mrs. Goring was on her knees before an open trunk, packing away clothing. She hurriedly swept some garments from a chair for Paula to sit down, and went on with her work, hardly looking up.

"Oh, Olive, you are really going. Is n't there some way to help it, — something Roger and I can do?"

Olive shook her head. She held a dress waist up to the light, looked at it critically, and then tossed it upon a pile of cast-off clothing in a corner.

"It is a shame," said Paula, indignantly. "To think that man's selfishness and improvidence should have brought you to this. You are giving up all

you care for, and going away with him to waste your life."

"Perhaps not. I have been living for things more worthless than a human soul. Society will not miss me; I shall go down without leaving a ripple."

"It is abominable that you should go on living with such a man. Leave him, Olive. Roger will arrange it for you; there would not be the least difficulty, — you know that. Come to us; we should be glad to have you, — more than glad."

Olive sank back on her knees, letting her hands fall in her lap for a moment, as she looked at Paula with a faint, pathetic smile.

"It does me good to feel your kindness, dear; but I should despise myself, and you would despise me, if I should leave him now. For the first time in his life he really needs me, — he even leans upon me. He asks my advice in every step he takes. If it were not for me, he would go straight to the bottom."

"Let him go, then. He would have let you go to the bottom of everything you cared for long ago. Oh, Olive, I cannot bear to think of his pulling you down with him. And why should he? He does not love you, — he is incapable of any feeling so unselfish; and you despise him. Why must you sacrifice your life to him, — what there is left of it? You have suffered enough, — insult and abuse and indignity. Let me take you home, dear. I will tell him to his face that I have taken you away. I should be glad to do it."

"Paula, do not talk so. You distress me beyond everything, and you only make it harder. I cannot tell why I should stay by him, except that he needs the moral support that I can give him; and for me, that is reason enough. I am stronger than he, and my judgment is better. And you know I have a little money. It will take care of us if we are very economical."

"Yes; what you have used to buy your gloves and shoes. You will never be able to live on it. You will starve yourself. I know you."

"Well, I must starve, then."

"Not if I can help it," thought Paula. At the least, she thought, she and Roger could contrive some plan by which Olive could be helped unconsciously to herself. She dropped the subject for the present, and sat looking on while Olive worked in silence.

She stayed to lunch, and late in the afternoon, while they were at work in the china-closet, taking down and packing the cups and plates, Olive said, —

"I have not asked you how it is with yourself, Paula. You know we have not talked together since the early summer."

Paula did not speak for a moment. Then she said, with a sort of diffidence, "I am doing nothing you could criticise, I think."

Olive looked up quickly. "It is all over with Mr. Hagar?"

"Yes."

Olive drew a long breath. "Oh, Paula, I am so glad! You do not know how glad. And Roger?"

"I think he cares for me a little," Paula said, blushing deeply, as she examined the inside of a china cup.

"A little!" repeated Olive, with honest irony. "Good heavens! Paula, you will never know what it is to love any one as Roger loves you. You are incapable of it. He is the one man in a million who could be trusted to go through the world and never look right nor left at any woman but you. He adores you. I know it, for I have had eyes to see, during the time when you were blind. I have seen sadness and disappointment cut little lines about his mouth, and paint shadows about his eyes. It is a look one seldom sees upon a man's face; but I have watched it grow and deepen. All the time, I do not believe he has once been aware of pitying himself; he has thought only of you. And you have been basely ungrateful, Paula; you have, indeed. You were angry with me when I told you this before, and you will be now, perhaps; but I cannot help that. What I say is true, every word of it. There is no one to say it to you but me, and you ought to hear it from some one. For years Roger Ferris has been laying at your feet the deepest love his great heart is capable of, and you have rejected it, walked over it, trampled upon it. It is inconceivable to me how you can have been so blind."

Paula stood a moment in silence; then she turned slowly away. "I will go and get my things. I had better go home; it is getting dark. I will come again to-morrow, if I can be of any assistance."

"You are not angry with me, Paula," said Olive, following her.

"No, I am not angry. I want to think a little by myself." She looked wistfully at her friend. "If you are right, Olive, I should certainly have known."

"I am right. Oh, how much you have missed that some women would have given their lives for! Paula —"

"Yes," said the other, faintly.

"You have much to atone for."

Paula freed herself from her friend's embrace, and a terrified look came into her eyes. "Oh, Olive, shall I tell him? Must I? Oh, it would be terrible. I cannot do it, Olive."

"No," said Olive, unhesitatingly. "There are some virtues better than frankness. He has had enough to bear for the present. Some time, perhaps, you will think best to tell him; but do not do it now. Give yourself to making him happy, — that is your duty."

Paula went out into the crisp November dusk. The truth of what Olive had said had indeed forced itself upon her mind. Blind, unworthy, unfaithful, — how could he love her? And yet he did, he did. She hastened her footsteps. Roger would not reach home until evening; but she longed for the shelter and seclusion of her own room, where she might think over what Olive had said.

As she came near the house, her eyes swept the front of the building and saw a light in his study

windows. Hardly knowing what she should do when she reached there, she quickened her pace almost to a run. She rang the electric bell so furiously that the housemaid came hurrying to the door. She heard Angela's voice in the library; but she did not stop to speak to her, though she had not seen her since morning. She flew up the three flights of stairs, tripping once or twice over her gown, and arrived breathless at her husband's door.

"Roger, let me in, let me in," she cried, shaking the knob.

He opened the door at once; and Paula threw herself into his arms, clinging about his neck, and hiding her face on his shoulder.

To say that Ferris was surprised would be both superfluous and inadequate. He drew her inside the room, and shut the door; he would have put her into a chair, but that she made it impossible by clinging to him. At last he placed her on the leather-covered lounge, and seated himself beside her, supporting her with his arm, and holding with the other hand the slender wrist that lay about his neck.

"What is it, Paula?" he asked, his head bent over hers. "Has anything happened? Are you frightened, — hurt? Tell me, — darling."

"What did you say?" she murmured, her sobs ceasing.

"I asked if anything has happened to trouble you; because if it has, I — I — should be — very sorry."

"But that was not all you said. You said — I mean, you called me — "

Ferris remained for a moment in a puzzled silence. "I don't think I understand, Paula. I am very stupid, as you know; and now I can only think of one thing, — that I am holding you in my arms."

"I don't wonder that you do not understand. I have been such a blind, heartless woman, — nothing that a wife should be. Olive said that I have made lines in your face." She lifted her head to look at him, searching his countenance in the light of the shaded lamp. "I do not see any lines. Roger, I honestly thought you did not care for me. I wish that if you really do, you would — just — tell me so."

If Paula was not satisfied with his response, it was because speech always fails us in our extremities of feeling. The language should not be condemned for this; it is a most useful means of communication in ordinary life, though entirely inadequate to such occasions as these. Fortunately, there are other mediums for conveying the emotions than those commonly employed in every-day affairs; and Ferris's face, bending over Paula's, as she rested in his arms, was as eloquent as one of the heavy volumes on the book-shelves would have been, had its closely printed pages been devoted to love instead of law.

Two distinct announcements of dinner failed to penetrate to their remoteness, for there is no isolation like that of love; and it was only when Angela's feet were heard laboriously ascending the stairs, that these two people became aware of a material existence. Paula started to an upright position, and began hurriedly to arrange her dishevelled hair.

"I know she is n't in papa's study," Angela was declaring, as she ascended, a series of puffs and grunts separating her words. "She never goes in papa's study; did you think she did, Nora?" pausing to laugh indulgently over the baluster. "You might look under the bed and in the closet, while I am calling papa. I guess he is in here; I can see a light under the door."

Her small hands turned the knob with some effort. When she entered the room, Paula was standing by the table, intently examining a penholder. Ferris, with his hands in the pockets of his smoking-jacket, stood a few steps away, his eyes resting dreamily upon his wife.

Angela, after one comprehensive glance, darted back to the head of the stairs.

"You need n't look under the bed, Nora. She is here, — I have found her; she is in papa's study." She came dancing back on the tips of her toes. "How funny you look, mamma!" she said, peering into her mother's face. "Are you going to let me sit up to dinner? Is that it? Mamma, are you? — yes, yes; I want to, mamma, — may I? Please let me," she urged, catching her mother's hand.

Paula turned to her husband. "Shall we let her?"

His eyes lingered upon her lovingly, as he answered in a low voice, "As you please, my dear."

"Ask papa," said Paula to the child.

"And have some chicken in a big plate," cried Angela, clapping her hands, having taken her father's consent for granted.

But for once in her little life she found herself distinctly *de trop*. It was not exactly a lively meal; and some little time before dessert came on, Angela leaned back in her chair, drew a long breath, confessed that she was sleepy, and allowed Nora to take her away.

Their eyes met over the coffee. "Are you sure you love me, Paula?" asked Ferris, for the tenth time.

"Yes, I am sure," she answered in a half-whisper, hanging her head.

When they had finished, he rose and stood beside his chair, waiting for her. As she approached, consciously, and blushing deeply, he put out his arm, and she came close to his side, laying one hand on his shoulder, and resting her cheek upon it. They walked slowly into the library together; and the heavy crimson curtain, falling behind them, shut them in.

CHAPTER XV

THE NEW MOON

THERE are a few persons who will divine what Paula's feelings were when, next morning, she received a note from Miss Maury, imploring Mrs. Ferris to come and see her at once, if possible. She had something very important to communicate, which she could not trust to a letter, and she was too ill with a severe cold to come out.

Paula knew as well as if she had heard it shouted from the house-tops what Grace's news would be. She was prepared for it in more ways than one; but those who are aware that human feelings can be so closely interwoven that it is well-nigh impossible to disentangle them one from the other, — to pull out one and say, This is love, and another and say, This is indifference, — they will perceive that it cost Paula something to tie on her veil and button her gloves, and set forth for that quarter of the city where Miss Maury lived in a suite of two small rooms.

It was not that she wanted Hagar for herself, — thus far she could reason clearly. There was not a shadow of doubt in her mind that her husband's love was the sea upon which she could most safely

sail, and the one upon which she should choose to sail henceforth, even were the other available.

If it had been anybody but Grace, Paula could have given them her blessing freely. But she felt sure that he had not been impelled to the suit by the force of passion, but that, on the contrary, he had turned to Grace in the bitterness of his disappointment, obeying the instinct common to the defeated lover, for wreaking vengeance upon some one, even if the victim should turn out to be himself. She had been dreading the possibility that he might take his own life; she would almost rather have known him dead than engaged to Grace.

The two were essentially unfitted for each other; they were too much alike not to jar constantly upon each other's sensibilities. Hagar was not the man to forget himself in his love for any woman; and Grace would never abdicate her self-erected throne to occupy a position at anybody's feet. They would learn to distrust each other, these two egoists; and distrust easily grows into dislike. Paula could foresee it all, — the gradual falling off of mutual tribute to each other's superior qualities, and a growing perception on the part of each of the fact that the other's interest was waning. She could see Grace's small figure drawn erect, her eyes snapping in angry disdain of the man who was too stupid to recognize her utter superiority to all other women and to most men; and the subtle, maddening smile under Hagar's mustache as he listened, breathing out a thread of cigarette smoke from his nostrils, with his hand-

some, fair head thrown back. An exchange of compliments would follow, — sharp, stinging eloquence from Grace, and cool, deliberate, measured sarcasm from Hagar. They would both be at white heat, — the one sparkling, the other smouldering. Paula shuddered. It was no imaginary picture she was drawing; it was the prophecy of her own soul to which she was listening as to a voice from the burning cavern. She felt like putting out her hand to stay this disastrous union; but, after all, it was no concern of hers. People must pay the penalty of their own foolishness, going deeper and deeper into suffering, if the lesson of one mistake is not sufficient.

With the thought of her own powerlessness to affect the current of events in those two lives, there came to Paula a certain sense of peace.

One cannot have attained to the larger view without having left a good deal behind. Petty jealousies, personal vanity, arrogance, and self-esteem, — kindred qualities, though each distinct from the other, were dropping away from Paula. The tree must shed its blossoms before it can bear fruit, and it may be that for something gained she had lost a certain sweetness and spontaneity that belong peculiarly to the springtime of life and love. Something had indeed died out of her, but it had made room for a great peace to enter in. And as peace is inseparable from joy, she felt within her heart the stir and rustle of a coming happiness greater than any she had ever known.

A muffled voice answered to her knock at Miss Maury's door; and Paula entered with a smile of greeting upon her lips.

"You see I came at once," she said, when she had seated herself on a low chair by the couch where Grace lay, a pile of pillows under her head, one little stockinged foot peeping out from under the hem of her pink flannel wrapper, — of a shade that would have set Hagar's teeth on edge. "Not that I do not know exactly what you wish to tell me. Listen, now. Mr. Hagar has asked you to marry him. He came quite late on Wednesday evening. You had been looking for him out of the window with the gas turned low; but you had given him up when at last he came. He insisted upon an immediate answer, — no coquetting, no delay; and he wishes to be married at once. You do not dare oppose him for fear of losing him, but you are trying to get two weeks longer than he is willing to allow, in order that you may be a presentable bride. You have disagreed already, and you are beginning to perceive that even a man with a handsome blond head and a pair of blue — You are beginning to realize, are you not," said Paula, finding the air of the room suddenly grown stifling, "that you have a somewhat obstinate person to deal with? May I raise the window just a bit, Grace? I am rather warm from walking, and it is a little close here."

"Yes, open it. Only please push that chair between me and the draught. It won't do for me

to add to this cold. The roses are dreadfully heavy, too; suppose you set them in the next room, Mrs. Ferris, if you don't mind, — there, on the table. I have n't had the energy to take them out of the box."

They must have cost a pretty sum, Paula thought, as she carried them into Grace's diminutive bedroom and laid them on the little bed. Hagar's card was on top of the long, dewy stems; but there was no need of that to tell her from whom they came.

"Where did you get such a cold, Grace?" she said, as she returned to her chair.

"Oh, I don't know. It 's very inconvenient just now. If I were a person of leisure, it would be quite different; but my work must be done, and, unfortunately, no one else can do it. I must say you are a clever woman, though you were not right in every detail. I had not been watching, for I was sure he would come. I knew, of course, that he liked me pretty well. But I suppose he told you something about it himself. You would hardly have guessed it all."

"Oh, I am a little bit of a soothsayer. Are you taking anything for your cold?"

"Phosphorus and bryonia. Then you are not at all surprised. I hoped you would be a little. I don't like people to anticipate me in that way. Of course, I was not surprised myself, though it was rather sudden at the last. I saw, when we first met at your house, you know, that he was rather taken. I have been perfectly neutral all the way

through, — that is, so far as he can tell. It 's no use to pretend to you now that I did n't fall dead in love with him the first time I saw him. But he is simply determined to marry me, Mrs. Ferris; you never saw anything like it. You positively have not the remotest idea how utterly irresistible he can be when he makes up his mind to anything, — a cool, indifferent-appearing man like him. I suppose I shall have to be ready in a month's time, — I hope to heaven I shall get over this nasty cold first. Don't I look like a fright? You know I told you how possessed he was to paint my portrait; though there were really times when he behaved so oddly that I should never have believed he cared a straw for me; only I suspected, you know, that it was a deliberate revenge on his part for the way I carried myself toward him. I have flirted with him unmercifully, I 'll admit that. Well, he 's a queer kind of lover altogether; but, do you know, I like it. I know well enough that he has the highest possible opinion of your humble servant's abilities. Manlike," continued Miss Maury, changing her position a little, and drawing the afghan in which she was wrapped closer about her shoulders, "he has already hinted at my giving up my work. I simply turned and looked at him a moment; and then I said, ' Never,' in a tone that I think he understood. His plan would be to go abroad at once; he says he is sick of this country. But I shall not consider such a project, unless, of course, I should go for the paper. I shall do that ultimately, I sup-

pose; but Mr. Devolle could not spare me just now. You see there is positively nobody on the staff who can do my work."

"No," acquiesced Paula, as the young girl fastened a pair of shining black eyes upon her face. Grace continued to regard her closely for a moment, her look becoming more objective, and expressing a sort of pained resentment.

"Are you feeling ill, Mrs. Ferris? You do not seem in the least interested. I thought you would be just delighted; I have been looking forward to telling you. It seems so funny"

"Of course I am interested," Paula hastened to say. "I am glad to hear of anything that concerns your happiness, Grace. But are you sure that you love him well enough to be happy with him always, after the novelty is worn off?"

"Who can tell?" the girl answered with a shrug. "As to that, one must take one's chance. Very few marriages stand the test of time, I imagine. Six weeks ago I should have gone wild over this, you know; and now, — well, nothing looks the same when you have got it. Still, as a marriage, it is nothing; and if I were not marrying for love, it would be hard to find any other reason, certainly. Yes, I am very much gone on him. He is the handsomest man in Boston, not even excepting your husband, Mrs. Ferris; and do you know, I notice when we are walking together that all the women make eyes at him. There 's one thing, — I just dread to tell Mr. Devolle. Oh, you are not going

so soon," as Paula began to button her jacket. "Why must you? I have such heaps to tell you," said Grace, putting up her under lip.

"They will keep," said Paula.

"Well, wait till I give you some of his roses. Perhaps if it had not been for you we should never have known each other; though as to that, I was reasonably sure to run across him sooner or later in my work."

The girl got up and went into the inner room, with the afghan trailing after her along the floor, and returned with three or four long-stemmed American Beauties, which she insisted, in spite of Paula's protestations, upon pinning on the outside of her jacket.

Paula could not have told, as she walked homeward, whether the blossoms were like fire or ice upon her bosom. She left them there until she reached the house, when she felt that she could bear them no longer; and tearing them off, she threw them from her into a corner of the room.

But later in the day, when shadows were beginning to gather under the furniture and in the corner where the roses lay drooping, she went and gathered them up and put them in a vase that stood on the library table. It was time for Ferris to come, and she was dressed for dinner. Her home, as she looked about it, seemed pervaded with a new spirit of tenderness and peace, as if a moon of love had risen upon it and was bathing it in radiance. Hagar had receded to a strange remoteness, being seen

only through the diminishing glass of Grace's egotism.

In proportion as he faded out of her life, the image of Ferris grew more and more significant, belittling every object that stood near it, except one, — the link that bound their two lives together.

THE END.

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